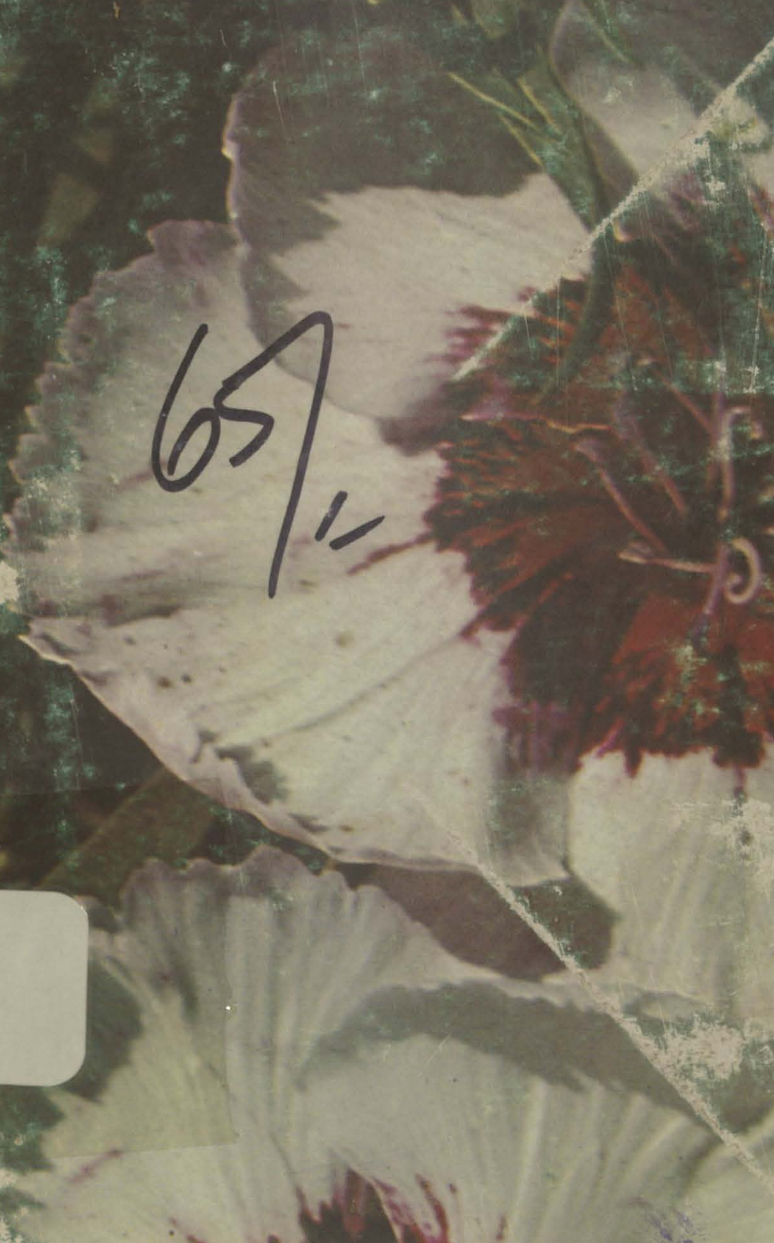


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# SHE WASN'T ASHAMED

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN INDIAN PROSTITUTE

ایک ہندوستانی طوائف کی آپ بیتی



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# FOREWORD

Their lot is deplorable—that of the widows, in this country. Even a housewife's lot is not enviable. And a pretty maiden's? Why, it is the death of her youthful aspirations—this system of ours, our so-called spiritual heritage. To quote Swami Krishnamurti's remarks in *New India*, dated 22nd March, 1928:

> "We have a splendid spiritual heritage, but it has now grown stale and profitless through the lack of the one thing which alone can keep any tradition fresh and profitable; and that is the spirit of real affection and consideration for others. The most potent survivals from an immemorial past are now what?...crystallized cruelties and selfishness, infant marriage, the heartless restrictions which we place on widows, our treatment of women generally, the whole system of untouchability. . . .what are these but matters in which the dead weight of custom has crushed out of us the ordinary decent feelings which should sweeten and harmonize the life of human beings? And what is caste itself but a system of organized selfishness?...These and similar things are our heritage to-day; and it is under the weight of this heritage that we are groaning. . . ."

It is to establish the above contention by *means* of facts from real life that this book is being presented.

Sex, says Mahatma Gandhi, is the sublimest of all instincts. Freud calls it the human instinct. And yet sex is the only instinct that we seek to suppress. As if one could suppress human nature and still be human! This conspiracy of silence engineered by prudery and false modesty has been broken at last by Leela. She presents facts that should enter into the working knowledge of young manhood and womanhood all over the world. Without in any way overstepping the bounds of decency, she in conjunction with Doctor Tej Bhan and Mrs. Turner is in a position to enlighten us on facts about sex that are of vital importance to us all. In a thorough knowledge of these lies the secret of Domestic Peace.

The names of the persons and places used are assumed.

—EDITOR

## INTRODUCTION

Leela, a pretty widow had been brought up in a rich family. Even as a girl she had the unique opportunity denied to Indian boys and girls, of being placed under the tutelage of a European obstetrician, a certain Mrs. Turner, who acquainted her with all the vital facts, a thorough knowledge of which is calculated not only to ameliorate the physical and intellectual condition of the race, but also to promote the material well-being of our domestic life.

It was due to the coincidence in effect of certain deplorable events in her life—circumstances over which she had no control, that even in her early widowhood she was first driven from pillar to post, and subsequently landed in a house of sin, where her thorough knowledge of sex stood her in good stead to the extent of saving her from falling over the precipice into the abysmal depths of the infernal regions.

Even this nightmare experience of hers proved to be a blessing in disguise, for in the hard school of life to which she was thus called, she picked up facts about sex which have come down to that fraternity from father to son, the secret of which they have guarded with their lives.

These most mysterious facts will, thanks to Leela, be now public property. They will, perhaps, be analysed in the light of Modern Scientific

Research, and the world made so much the richer by this analysis.

It was by a similar combination of events that she was elevated into a sphere, where under the guidance of a sage she succeeded not only in sublimating her instincts, but also in solving in those regions of Peaçe and Tranquility, which she aptly calls SEX UTOPIA, the most elusive problems of our work-a-day world, prefecting the only effective formula of DOMESTIC PEACE.

She started as a benighted wayfarer, trudging her weary way on a dark and dreary night, across a trackless jungle, haunted by the dread of something weird, uncanny, lurking behind the impenetrable gloom. The eerie prospect damped her otherwise jovial spirits, and her movements slow, as though on pralysed limps, had not carried her before she stumbled, suffering physical and mental tortures. All at once she saw light. It made the prospect bright as day. Her fear evaporated, and she safely reached her haven of peace. This light we seek to convey to the reader through her autobiography as well as the Doctor's, embodied in these pages. In strict conformity with the wishes of the autobiographer facts are being presented much as they came, without any serious attempt at editing them. Any looseness of style or remissness that might unavoidably have crept in may, therefore, please be overlooked.

EDITOR

## A VOLUNTARY CONFESSION

### ALL NAMES ARE ASSUMED

*It was not a church confessional. It was the parlour of an ascetic—a woman sadhu—who had had her day of revelry and gaiety, and in the fulness of her age, had now retired to the fastnesses of the Himalayan jungle to seek peace and shelter under the wings of one of the greatest* rishis *of her time, Swami Vishal Dev. The ascetic's name was Leela. She must have been very pretty in her prime, but now that she was old, she was all that was left of a glory that was gone. Her confessors now seated in front of her were on old man, named Gangoo, still handsome in his three score and ten. Dr. Tej Bhan, a young man, barely thirty, with well-shaped features and a dignified bearing, possessed of a robust virile comeliness of his own.*

*Gangoo, on old domestic and also her paramour, was the father of Leela's only daughter Sheela, a very pretty virgin-widow, aged 23, who after a nightmare experience had been snatched from the jaws of death by the Doctor, and was now under her mother's protection in that valley of peace, known as Shantinagar or Mahilagarh.*

*It was the home of ladies, manned and ruled over by them, under the aegis of the great rishi, the sanctuary of such among them as are sought to be crushed by cruel convention, widows and those whose husbands have high handsdness of the sterner sex.*

*They had come to Mahilagarh by invitation presumably becaause Leela was convinced that the Doctor's love was returned, and in the interest of domestic peace. Sheela's wedding must come off at once. This most astounding, most sensational confession was made to the Doctor, and was sent on to us for publication. It is being here reproduced partly in Leela's own words, and partly in Doctor Tej Bhan's.*

*EDITOR*

## PROLOGUE

"Now, who could have thought so? So captivating, her hazel eyes reflecting the purity of her soul!"

"Yes, Shamo was a prostitute," was my cool rejoinder.

"She was a daughter of a fine family. Her mother took her to a fair when she was sixteen where she got lost in the crowd. She was picked up by an old hag who was in the gang of the scoundrels, who carried her away to a sequestered spot, where a few college students espied her, and after an open fight rescued her and restored her to her doting parent. A breath of suspicion hovered over her head, so that she was under a shadow. The doors of society were banged upon her. No decent daughter would have anything to do with such a maiden as that! Her parents per indifferent. They sent her to a girls' college. But t ere too she did not find the atmosphere congenial to her. The girls seemed to avoid her. Boys didn't. So she made a boy-friend. He was rich and handsome. A flaming love developed, but they were of different religions. Marriage they knew was out of the question. The boy's parents might accept: the girl's . . . never! But youthful love being blind, they continued to meet at the house of an unscrupulous mistress for their hours of stolen love, and tbe girl came from the meetings warm with exhilaration, and by and by became familiar with immorality.

Months passed. She felt she was in paradise. He was only too familiar with her charm, and too much familiarity breeds contempt. He grew indifferent. They met only casually, and the intimacy began to languish. He was no longer ardent. The eternal flame of love burned itself out, and the youth dropped out of her life.

Then her parents accidently discovered her plight, and made it so hot, she had to fly. At Hardwar she met a virgin widow. She was woman of perfect shape and imperfect morals. She had been through a similar experience. She called our girl a fool.

"Why should you starve? she said. "Let men pay. I'll tell you how it is done."

She had no money. She was despondent and disillusioned. So she took the widow's advice and became a prostitute. She had a hell life, until our agent came to her rescue. She joined our fold. Now she is quite a changed woman. If you ask her about it, she will tell you it is a mistake to deplore sex element which enters into our lives. Sex powers do bring with them certain temptation. but they also bring a challenge to self-mastery. It is a silent challenge though, but its silence is eloquent. It seems to ask :

"Have you a will? If so, prove it."

There's no way yet discovered to cheat nature. Play the fool and pay the price. This natural law grinds on and its mills are merciless.

I know of a girl whom we attempted in vain to rescus. She had fallen into the clutches of a scoundrel. He was handsome; she was supremely lovely. He said he loved her with all the earnestess he was capable of, and she returned his love with equal warmth. It was a full-fledged romance, and they felt everything was going to turn out well in the end, in spite of the obstacles. They had only to wait and let their love grow on.

They let their love grow on. The days lengthened into weeks, the weeks into months, and then there was the grim sequel—the birth of a girl. The scoundrel was too terrified to play the game. He left the girl to face the music alone. A horrible lot-more than flesh and blood could endure.

Her heart being not too strong, she did not rally.

There is among our ranks another prostitute whom we were able to reclaim. She was a widow, belonging to an orthodox family, who would rather burn herself on the funeral pyre than think of a remarriage. There is, according to them, a gulf between the nature of man and that of woman. It is through her that the race is propagated. It is through her that the health of the rising generation is secured. Hence she is not to be converted into a machine for procreation of children. She must exercise restraint, which she can effectively do only by pride of virtue and stringent laws of her community. The one ideal of womanhood is to be the respected

mother of sons. She is guided in her marital relations by a very strong instinct for motherhood. This instinct may be as strong in a widow as in a wedded wife. And she was a widow. She was thrilled by the thought of holding a morsel of humanity in her arms, which would be all her own, and a pledge of her husband's love. That husband had died overnight. His brother-in-law, a bachelor, was a gay-living man, with many a seduction to his credit. He thought many things of life were old-fashoined, and chastity was one of them! He was an ingratiating youth, and he had his hold on the poor widow. The sequel was the birth of a child, ostracism and initiation into the ranks of the town courtesans. She was an abandoned girl, quite irreclaimable when we got her. And now! Well now she is all right.

"How did you come to be an ascetic?" was the Doctor's question.

It was in the nature of sharp rebuke. I who who letting off steam raking up old scandals where others were concerened, needed to be pulled up a little. It seemed to say: "True, they were prostitutes. But they are your sister ascetics. How about you? Were you a prostitute, too?"

Being pulled down a high horse, as it were, it reminded me of old times, when one of my admirers would come up to my flat bold as brass, but approaching the door of my private apartments drop all his rigidness and be meek as a mouse. It must meet the Doctor on the square, and yet put him in his place, in spite of his superciliousness. So I made a fitting reply which is recorded in these pages.

## CHAPTER I

### Behind the Wall

"The prostitute's is a place where none comes the swell. They enter in all obsequiousness, powwow with the matron or harlot-in-chief and unless one has a long purse, in which case he may be closeted with the Beauty Queen, retire with one or other of the inmates of the establishment, and early next morning walk out-minus their purse."

Gangoo knows that once, long long ago, I was the Beauty Queen of one such establishment.

[For Gangoo, poor soul, it was mum's the word. The Doctor looked puzzled. He thought I was trying to pull his leg. He suspected a lark. How could the Queen of such a sacred colony of maidens supposed to be of pristine purity have so dubious an origin ?]

"You mean a lady—ahem—of easy virtue ?" he asked.

"Yes," I continued. "I was a prostitute. I was then twenty-four, a widow, with a striking personality—They thought my charm was irresistible—something that sent them raving mad.

"But they came again and again, in the darkness of the night. They dare not visit me by day, for my touch was supposed to be contaminating. A prostitute, however *chic* and charmingly clean, is withal, an unclean woman ; for they say her soul is being daily defiled with her person ...... They are a set of hypocrites. Their own souls are being hourly defiled by their duplicity and lustfulness and greed. Yet they call themselves clean. They are *mahatmas*. Haven't they a look of piety, and purity about them ? What if they sell their soul for a few coppers, or for cheap popularity ? The prostitute very reluctantly

sells her person to save herself from starvation. They sell their souls with alacrity, merely for the fun of the thing. The prostitute is damned. They are held in high esteem.

"I wasn't born a prostitute. I had to resign myself to it by force of circumstances, just the same as they were elevated their dignified position by the selfsame force. One such *mahatma*, a favourite of fortune, confessed he could not spare his wife his sexual attention even on the night he lost a dear relation. Far from it, I was so undersexed I did not submit myself to the act oftener than ten times in the whole tenure of my life as a prostitute, and, to be quite candid, my sexual climax was reached only once in a lifetime. This cannot be the record of a legally wedded wife. When straight from the palanquin she is pushed into her husband's bedroom, sore and weary and home-sick, on the verge of tears, least disposed to submit, her husband to assert hls over powering manliness forces the act on her committing, as it were, a rape. And subsequently, although he is very well aware that a woman is in no humour to yield her person with alacrity on all the blessed days of the month, repeats the act almost every day."

"That isn't as it should be," broke in the Doctor. "The husband should go to his wife only when her potential desire is at its highest, that is about ten days after the menstrual flow has ceased. That is the medical opinion."

"Precious little they care for medical opinion. They commit the act on any day, at all hours. They ruin their wives' health. They overdo the act. They are too selfish to hold themselves in. Never mind if their health too goes to the dogs. They recklessly indulge, and when they find their virility utterly exhausted they take to drunkenness and drugs as a means to temporary excitement.

"Well, well, the average housewife is worse off

than a porstitute, so far as her personal sacrifice is concerned. But she yields her person to one man alone. As for the poor prostitute, she has to be a universal wife. She is a social outcast, although she may be less subjected to sexual attentions than the housewife.

"To revert to my story I come of a very respectable family of Bijnaur. I am a Kayasth by caste. My grandfather was a well-to-do grain merchant. But due to reckless speculation he fell on evil days, gradually sinking lower and lower, till by the time my father came into his business, far from being rich, we just missed being destitute

"Father had a widowed sister at Delhi whose husband and been a civil officer. He had left her a little nest egg, which ead made her independent for life. She needed someone whom she could trust, and who more trustworthy than her own brother? So when she visited Bijnaur, she somehow succeeded in persuading father to come with her to Delhi.

"We were four in the family, father, mother, Champa aged fourteen, and I, Leela. aged eleven. Mother was invalid. I sometimes suspected that she was shamming, for she had nothing worse than a headache. She had chronic constipation, though, and some stomach too, now and again."

"Her trouble must have been genuine enough," exclaimed the Doctor. "Most women in this country suffer like that, and some suffer tortures. Do you know why?"

"Of course not."

"Well, the fact is the lower part of our trunk is a framework of bones we call pelvis It is a broad flat basin. Within this basin lie the various organs. A woman's womb too lies in this basin. Each organ has its allotted space. and there is a bit of space in between so as not to interfere with its freedom of functioning.

Girls and grown women too, sometimes neglect to evacuate the bladder and bowels. Their fullness causes congestion of the womb or falling of it, with all its attendant ills. By its false position the womb crowds the blood vessels, thus interfering with portal cirulation, or circulation through the liver. It disturbs the distribution of blood. Hence a number of complications.

"Again, some women to keep their breast and abdomen in shape, wear too tight fitting clothes, thus unconsciously restricting the functioning of their lungs, heart, and liver. The result is that the blood is not purified. Hence they are afflicted with constipation, liver and stomach trouble, broken-down nerves, headache and general weakness.

"Beside they need roomfuls of fresh air, which we deny them owing to *purdah*. They need to cultivate habits of exercise and recreation. And......

I was bored stiff. So I exclaimed, Oh Doctor, I given in. She was certainly not shamming. She was really ailing all the time she said she was. But that entailed such a heavy burden of housework on poor Champa and on me, we thought she was only foxing, which. I now know she wasn't for she was indeed a fashionable woman, and when I come to think of it, she did wear tight fitting clothes.

"Aunt was a kindly lady. She was a philonthropist, but more often than not her charity was misplaced. There are so many *seths* in this country who give crores of rupess in charity. But who benefits by their charity? Those very *mahatmas*, the sole monopolists of Spiritualism on earth, faddists of the old School, who seek to try experiments that have been tried too often, in vain.

"Aunt's charity too took the same shape. She Indiscriminately fed a number of overfed Brahmins—*mahatmas* of course, and when a poor labourer, who

had lost his job owing to an accident and whose wife, and small children were actually starving, came for a loaf to shut their mouths with dry bread, or when a sick person, whose days were numbered, called for help to be able to go through an expensive operation which might perchance save his life; or again if a poor widow called to beg for alms to be able to perform the obsequies of her only son who had just died, she shrugged her shoulders and reminded them that the world was a battle-field, and the law of the game was the survival of the fittest. She had nothing to do for those who could not help themselves. Even God withheld His hand from them.

"As for God—

"She preferred to take these *mahatmas* on trust. She was told He needed a house to live in, a palatial building befitting His station in life. She had it built. Someone had the audacity to remark that a home for orphans and another for widows was badly needed at Delhi. He argued that God has so many houses to live in And perhaps He did not, after all, like to be shut up in a house. He got the snubbing he deserved. She called him an agnostic.

"She took a fancy to me, however, and with my father's permission adopted me as her own daughter."

## CHAPTER II

### An Unwanted Child

"Things change materially after that. We were admitted to the aunt's private mansions, dined at her table, had our wardrobes adequately supplied at her expense, used her cars and buggies, and did our shop-

ping against her credit. Father put on the airs of an aristoctat, but mother's health deteriorated. Aunt engaged Mrs. Turner, an Englise nurse, to look after her, and later learning that she had experience as an obsterician governess, and teacher, placed me and incidentally also Champa undr her charge.

"What Mrs. Truner taught us by way of reading and writing was valuable enough.

"One day as we were taking a turn in our compound, Mrs. Turner asked Champa why she limped. She had had a strange phenomenon, and she was very much afraid something was going to happen to her. She had a bloody flow."

"Is that all?" asked Mrs. Turner. Why, it is only the monthly discharge. It happens to every girl at your age. You needn't worry. It is just normal. It shows you are now of age to be called a young woman. You are no longer a child, so no more short skirts; no more dolls.

"Champa was brooding. She felt sleepy. She was sent to bed at once. Meanwhile, Mrs. Turner and I had a lone talk on the subject which might not interest you, Doctor, but will certainly be appreciated by your friend."

"Please go on."

"I asked Mrs. Turner, what was really the matter with Champa, and she explained. 'It is a perfectly natural phenomenon. Every healthy gitl has a monthly flow like that at the age of fourteen and after. The flow lasts for three days. Then it slowly subsides, until it ceases. This process is repeated every 28 days. During the flow no heavy weight should be lifted, no violent exercise taken."

"What is this flow due to?"

"There is gland named ovary. It secretes eggs. These are the female egg cells. If a male cell

happening to be about. fertilizes a female egg cell, just out of the ovary, it forms itself into an embryo or unborn child. This process is called conception. If the egg is not impregnated by the male cell, it bursts and flows out. This monthly flow is called ovulation or menstruation. After the embryo or unborn child has found for itself a setting in the womb, the flow ceases, till such time as the mother is delivered of the child."

"Is this child a boy or a girl?"

"Well it all depends. The female egg cells are of one type only. They are are all alike. Let us call this type X.

"The male cells, on the other hand, are of two types, this X type and the Y type. If an X type of male cell fertilizes a female egg cell, the combination is XX, which is a girl. If a Y type of male cell fertilizes a female egg cell, the combination is YX, which is a boy."

"Is menstruation painful?"

"No, it is a painless affair. In case it causes pain, or the flow is not regular, it is a case for the Doctor.

"Don't you think Champa's is a case for the Doctor?"

"No. Champa is quite normal. She feels a bit queer, because it is her first flow. It will pass off.

"Doesn't it injure a girl's health?"

"Not the least little bit. But two days before the flow and eight, nine, or ten days after it, the girl has an uncontrollable desire to mate with someone. If she is a sensible girl, she knows how to to hold herself in. Mating is desirable only when the organs have properly developed, which is when she has reached her twentieth year. Still, wayward girls take to some or other vicious practice, and ruin their health. Some frequent place where youth of all ages con-

gregate. This sometimes lands a girl in a situation from which it is difficult for her to extricate herself. Pregnancy develops. Afraid of a betrayal she seeks help to about. No doctor will help her, for it is murder to take life even though it is an hour old. In nine months or a little more she is delivered of a child. She discards it, of course. It is an unwanted child."

"If she doesn't what the child, what does she do to it?" I asked.

"It is a long story. She sometimes goes to the extent even of thr.wing it away."

"Oh! how horrible."

The Doctor's interest had been thoroughly aroused. He began;

"Mrs. Turner has not read the situation aright. An Indian girl is chaste. She holds her virture high. She is inherently so. I admit there are cases here and there of a foolish girl being led astray, but they are exceptional."

"Mrs. Turner," said I, "was also a trained midwife and had often passed for a lady-doctor. She narated her experiences to us, and one or two of them that stand out in my memory, I shall sum up for your information. Mrs. Turner began:

### The Music Mistress

One cool October evening I was approached by a very bright girl. ":Mem Sahib," she began, "I have been missing my monthly for months. Will you give me something that will set me right?"

"Are you married? " I questioned.

She wss undecided.

"I can quite see it all my child. Who was the scoun.rel?"

She burst into tears, and related her story as follows:—

"It wasn't a scoundrel. No, Mem Sahib, it was *kismet*. I am the only daughter of a very rich

man, whom I need not name for he has disowned me. There was a time when he doted on me, fondled me, so that I became a pampered, coddled, spoilt child. I remember once when I had a touch of malaria, he sat by my bed-side all day, and when I complained of a headache, of excruciating pains. he wept like a child, I remember how he played with me, and when I pouted my lips affecting anger, he grovelled at my feet, crawling and cringing in a fond attempt to coax me back to smiles. I was, so to speak, the apple of his eye ; but this was when my mother was alive.

"When she passed away, and he brought home my stepmother, I was no longer the centre of his affections. There was another womao to share his love with me. And by and by as she succeeded in poisoning his mind against me, his love and care shifted entirely to that woman. For me he had no more caresses. He sent me to school, however, spent on my clothes, and allowed me the usual pocket money, but was otherwise cold, indifferent, distant. I lost his love, and the consequence was there was a void in my life. If you spoil a child by love, love is food for that child. She misses it more than she would miss her food or raiment. She is, in fact, love-starved and grabs whatever is offered her, without a question. My movement used to be carefully watched, when my father needed me at home. Now that his love had taken another turn, he wanted me out of the way. To be quite candid, I too wanted to keep away from home as long as I could, for I was quite fed up with the taunts and gibes of my stepmother. The major part of my day was spent at the house of my music mistress. Ever since I was in my short skirts, music has been with me an obsession, and as I happen to have a thrill in my voice, the mistress liked me the more for it. We talked. I confessed to her that life had lost its early bloom, and I was unhappy. She said it was tragic. I was so beautiful, and

beauty and happiness should go hand in hand. She thought my unhappiness was due to my virgin sweetness being shrouded in ignorance. My heart must have begun to hide a sense of boundless isolation. To be more blunt, I needed some one whom my beauty could stir to romantic passion.

"She advanced another argument which was all the more enjoyable, because of its novelty. She said, 'Every maiden gives expression to her charming love-play in a sort of rhythmic way. There is an ebb and flow in it according in the moonmonth tide of menstruation. Two days before the menstrual flow it is at its climax. During the flow it is at its lowest, so that it leaves the woman cold. Nine days after the menstrual flow has ceased, it is at its highest. This subtle ebb and flow is carried on from month to month.

"I did not understand the significance of her remarks, and told her so. Like an average Indian maiden I was extremely sex-shy. But I was curious to understand. She explained herself. You want a mate who would rouse in you a passion that would transport you to Heaven."

"I want nothing of the sort," said I.

"You will always say that, till your stepmother finds you a mate gifted perhaps, with the power of the pelf, but sexually bankrupt. They do not do that in the West. There they let the boy and the girl make a free choice of love. Why not find your own man yourself, a man who would reverence and adore you? I know a man who would just suit you to perfection, who would unlock in you that electric force we call love, that would thril your being to the point of ecstasy. For God's sake have pity on your youth! The rhythmic sex-tide has begun to show itself in you. Its indications have to be obeyed. Obey them, and you enjoy yourself to the utmost, not only sexually but also from the point of view of health

and vitality. Let your capricious stepmother find a good-for-nothing mate for you, and learn to rot in utter helplessness and despair."

"I need not dilate on the things she said in utter disregard of the fact that I was an ignorrnt, virtuous maiden who shuddered at anything lecherous. But smuthy talk gradually makes one blunt It was so in my case. By and by I came to have no scruples in discussing sex freely with my mistress. I even became so bold as to receive in the privacy of her bedroom the man she thought was just the man for me.

"He is just the man for me, smart, robust, sensible, highly sympathetic. He could study the indications of that rhythmic sex-tide, and arouse in me that passion which could send through me an electric thrill of rapturous delight. You have seen the consequence. Mem Sahib. The fellow is madly in love with me. But his people will not yield. We can't wed."

"A difference of caste, I believe."

"Not even that. Our horoscopes indicate that we are not well-matched. He was born on a Tuesday and I was not. Hence, if we wed, these superstitious people believe that one of us must die!

"My stepmother learnt of my plight last night. She has driven me out of the house. My lover has given me a purse. If you treat me, Mem Sahib, and help me rid myself of the unwanted baby, I shall pay you whatever your fee."

"Did you help her get rid of the baby?" I asked.

"Not a bit of it. I helped her to deliver a bonny little baby, a son, the prettiest little darling that ever saw the light of day."

"But what was the sequel to the story?"

"The youth attempted to commit suicide, and it was with the greatest medical skill they could save

him. He said it was no use trying to make him live, when all he wanted was a speedy death. So willy-nilly that wedded the two, and the child went home to his father."

## CHAPTER III

### Slave Wives.

It was a few weaks after, that we were picking flowers in the garden, when I started the conversation.

"Are you married, Mrs. Turner?"

She seemed to hasitate. But then thinking better of it said, "Yes, my child."

"And where is your husband?"

"I don' know. You see, he left me. He was what we call a deserter. He ran away leaving me to myself, to make shift on mine own."

"He must have been a very bad man indeed."

"You can't say that. He might have been waylaid... infatuated...in the clutches of a siren- He was very handsome."

"Why marry a man so wayward?"

"One never knows if another is wayward."

"Then why marry at all?"

"Marriage, my good girl, is nature's way of making men multiply! If there were no marriages the human species would soon die out. Besides if a woman did not marry she would suffer both in body and mind."

"But doesn't marriage convert a free girl into a slave?"

"That was the primitive idea. The savage of Greenland and some Pacific islands kidnaps a girl to make her his wife. Round about the Coucasus Range you have the most beautiful girls in the world. You

must have heard the myth of those parts being the home of tha fairies. The maidens there, are possessed of a supernatural charm. Yes most of the savage tribes among them cannot marry unless they capture a girl and escape with her unscathed. They are hotly persued and fired upon, but if the man is the girl's choice, they intentionally shoot wide of the mark. In the neighbouring hills os Simia they hold a marriage market where very prettp girls are offered for matrimony, and the prettier the girl the higher the amount charged for her hand. The girls are treated as though they are slaves. In Russia they used to offer along with the rest of the dowry a time piece of cane mounted with gold. This was to enable the husband to thrash the wife if she dared to disobey his slightest wishes Another example of the slavish mentality of women is offered by the Spanish wives seeking to be chastised by their husbands. They did not think a person who did now use the cat-o'-nine-tails on their bare backs, so there were streaks of blood, as man enough. I am oot a scholar of your sacred books, but the lady-doctor, Miss West, a missionary who was my teacher and who knew a lot about your literature, told me your systəm allows a girl or a boy to be tied with a rope and chastised with a fine green bamboo stick. The wife, I was told, can be similarly treated without the law being had of the husband. The wife among the Aryans was said to be treated on terms of equality, but this was only in theory In practice even some of the most highly placed men are said to have discured their wives, without giving them the right to remarry. The law is all for men. Women can claim nothing by right, because they have no rights. They are mere goods and chattels of their menfilk."

The docror was in high dudgeon.

"She did not know what she was talking abou." said he. "Indian culture is something of which we

may well be proud. It aims at securing and maintaining domestic peace. What it the girl's position is a little inferior? So is still the queen of the house, her husband's most cherished commade in life. Unlike the Western wife she sticks to her husband through thick and thin.

"This is all for the best in spite of the modern craze. The girl of to-day sees the woman of the West flutter about from flirtation to flirtation. She calls this emancipation of women. She forgets that this emancipatian would be misplaced in this country. The Western girl is out for pleasure. She does not know how to take things seriously. Her role isn't that of a sensible wife. Her goal is that of a butterfly. She has no conception of a true wife's grave responsibilities. How can she produce the greatest masterpiece of life. *i.e.*, the soul of a child?

"Let us drop tha subject of the West. We are talking of India, our house. All Indian institutions are our institutions. We see them as we ought, through the glasses of partiotism. They appear to us to be the best. Let us refrain from doing injustice to the culture of other people without thoroughly going into its merits and demerits. It may have its bad points, in our eyes. So may our culture have its bad points in their eyes. Why raise a controversial point? Why not discuss dispassionately. Mrs. Turner may be absurdly wrong. It may be the Gospel truth she preaches. There is no harm in giving it a patient hearing. If you won't have any more of it, let us not refer to the subject at all."

"No. no," said the doctor a bit molified. "Please go on. It is all very intererting."

Mrs. Turner cited so many of the strangest instances of marriage customs in this country, I was appalled. She said. Here the bride is tied on to the husband and follows him submissively, and the highest compliment they can pay her is to call her as docile as a cow. It reminds me of Africa where wives may

be bartered for so many heads of cattle. She is no better than a cow. Only a cow is worshipped, and a wife is sometimes whipped.

"In most parts of the country wives have to drudge. There being more women than men in certain high castes—boys are bought at a tremendously high price. I remember a pretty but poor girl having to go without a husband; for her father could not find a rich dowry for her. She consecrated herself to the service of the gods. But she was, as I said, a pretty girl, and the guardians of her faith were roused to passion at the sight of her looks and treated her as a prostitute. She started to sell her honour independently of them, for she was disgusted with the ways of her tormentors, who allowed no latitude to the ebb and flow of her sexual desire as determined by her monthly period. There are hosts of pretty girls who are dedicated to the service of the gods and are, so to speak, prostitutes who must consecrate their person to the preists or their deputies.

"In some parts of the country women are held in strict *purdah.* The condition of their domestic life is least conducive to health. Some have been known to be cruelly tortured merely to provide their sadistic and sexually weak husbands with sexual excitement. The poor woman puts up with anything that comes to her from her husband, for she is tauget to slave for him. That is a doctrine of her faith. In some castes, marriage used to take place at so early an age as six years. Any marriage contracted before 17 for the girl and 20 for the boy is marriage before maturity, and as such is the cause of much infirmity, disease and imperfect development among children. The most oppressive part of it is that among a majority of your people there is no divorce law. A husband may marry as often as he pleases. Not so an oppressed wife. All this being forced upon the girl, one might suppose she was looked upon as no better than a slave.

"In more advanced civilsation love is the basis of mairiage. The woman marries only by choice. She can't be compelled to marry against her will. Before marriage she must be wooed and her consent obtained. In Europe the consent of the parents too is obtained before taking the final step. In America man and woman come into closer contact and study each other before entering on matrimony."

"Yes," said the Doctor with some heat. "In America they enter into a strong sort of contract called 'companionate' marriage. A boy and a girl meet. There is no marriage ceremory. They cohabit. This goes on for some time till one is fed up with the other, and then picking up his or her hat walks out never to return. This is how they are wrecking the sacred institution of marriage, and yet you speak of their culture as something enviable.

He was visibly excited. I tried to pacify him.

"This is highly objectionable," I admitted. "I do not at all support their view. I am only stating what Mrs. Turner told me."

The doctor continued, "Besides, this love basis game is a dangerous affair You see love and passion are two distinct sentiments. Love is lasting; passion is only of a short duration. Passion is really the outcome of infatuation. It passes away with beauty and youth. As soon as the freshness of youth fades, passion evaporates. When passion subsides the couple may as well part, which you know would be absurd if there existed a marriage contract between them. Hence choice marriages are not all desirable. If marriage is based on the mature judgment of the elders, love soon springs up and such love holds on to the end.

"Passion is a fire that soon burns itself out. It is the harbinger of romantic love and romantic love can never be true love, for when the lover subsequently realises that the beloved, his idol, whom he looked upon as an embodiment of perfection, and

whom he extolled to the skies, has after all feet of clay, he has a very rude shock; and that makes marriage very unhappy indeed.

"Love that one develops after marriage is based on esteem and thought and reason and has very firm footing. Hence our system is the soundest, and that of the West, very unsound indeed."

"Yes, Doctor," said I. "What you say sounds sensible enough and although I believe I am quite competent to discuss this subject with you in the light of my vast and varied experience, I should prefer to hold my peace and let facts speak for themselves. Here is one related to me by Mrs. Turner. I shall reproduce it word for word in her own words."

## CHAPTER IV

### Just Her Luck

"Her name was Mira, and she was a very pretty girl. Her father was a clerk in some office drawing a meagre salary. Mira's mother, a shrewd woman was an excellent housekeeper and a clever manager. She stretched every piece of it so that it went the longest way it could go. She gave the husband and children good food, and their leavings she ate herself She kept her husband presentable, for he had to go to the office, and her own dress and children's was of the roughest, russet, cheapest fabrics. You in the East are fortunate in the disposition of your women-folk. The one object of their lives is to maintain domestic peace, at any cost. No scrifice is too great for them, poor souls. Mira's mother was an embodiment of self-sacrifice.

"Mira's father too had a kindly disposition. He doted on his children; and the husband and wife were devoted to each other. It wan't rich family at all—according to our standard it was a very poor family indeed—but it a was happy one all the same, for you Indians are fatalists out and out, and

will be easily satisfied with whatever falls to your lot.

"Mira was a grown-up girl, about 14, I think, and you are aware it is quite a marriageable age in this country. But the marriage of a daughter means a very heavy expen-e, for the bridegroom's people want a substantial dowry. Without that no girl can be allowed to settle down peacefuly with her husband They torture her, both the husband and the mother-in law, trying to squeeze money out of her parents. There is no end to their cupidity, and the torture.

"So Mira's marriage had to be held over indefinitely. I have told you when the monthly period starts the girl has rhythmic ebb and flow of sexual urge which it doesn't do anybody any harm to keep in check, till the organs have been properly developed. But girls will be girls, as boys will be boys Mira being a bit oversexed was easily excited. They lived under the shadow of a very rich man's house. This man had a youthful son whose name was Thakur Das. This youth took a violent fancy to Mira and they arranged to have cladestine meetings on the top floor of Thakur's house. Mira too shrewd like her mother. She met him on the sly. Although in the exuberance of passion they were so carried away as to fall in each other's embrace, and kiss each other warmly enough, yet Mira would not at all allow him to go all the way and violate her chastity. No Indian girl will allow a male, however free with her otherwise, to go to that extent, unless he weds her. Then she becomes his slave, and he can take with her any liberties he likes. Mira, thus, was chaste—in the accepted sense of the word. But these meetings on the sly cannot long be concealed. Thakur's father came to know of the affair. He could not tolerate his only son worthy hundreds of thousands to wed a pauper's daughter. He knew the girl had a pretty face and a graceful figure, but he could not afford to be done out of thousands of rupees of dowry by his silly

son's infatuation. He thought the girl was a siren and held him under some sort of a spell.

"He was an acute man of business. He knew that warning is never any good when mind is obsessed and infatuated, and that no amount of persuasion or even oppression can extinguish the flame of love once kindled. It can, perhaps. be suppressed by a change of scenes. He was a skin flint. He had never allowed himself or his family a holiday. But that summer season he took his family to Mussorie, and stayed there for full five months pretending that it was a pleasure trip, and a little diversion oils the wheel of life. Meanwhile, the fire of love still smouldered in the youthful hearts.

"They returned at last, but this time settled down in a house a few yards away from their old home. Thakur was restless to see the girl's pretty face and plant a kiss on her sweet vermilion lips. He could not do that. His father had placed such watch and vigilance over him as to keep him practically shut up in the house. The clever boy thought of a device to get into touch with the girl. He bought some string of the type that is used in flying kites, tied a brick-bat to one end, and made many unsuccessful attempts to throw it on to her little house-top. He succeeded at last, and by this means conveyed a note to the girl to say he was dying to see her. Would she promise to be true to him? She wrote back to say she would.

" This was silly way of exchanging love letters, and it landed the lovers into trouble. One day the brick-bat fell wide of the mark. The note was picked up by a boy who showed it to his father. This man quietly took it to Thakur s father, and the cat was out of the bag. The acute business man this time took a most decisive step. He took his son to Bombay, where he was lodged with someone he knew, who entrusted him to a private tutor, who was the

last word on harshness and cruelty. The father explained to him the boy's weakness and bade him not only keep an eye on him so as to make it impossible for him to communicate with the girl, but also try to knock some sense into his silly head, so that he should learn to be an acute business man. The man said he knew his job so well that he could bear an ass into a human being. It was his day's job. Only he needed the guardian's permission to handle the boy in a right businesslike manner, and he was to be paid in advance. He was paid in advance and Thakur's education and reform and surveillance began with a vengeance.

" Flagellation is said to break a fellow's spirit. Does it break a boy's? Does it, a girl's? My answer is. 'Decidedly not.' The tutor was a brute. He knew only brute law which is sheer brutality."

"Come here," be thundered.

Thakur approached him.

Thakur had put on a new-*dhoti*. He did not like it soiled. So he did not go down on his knees at once. He got a kick on the right shin and a slap on the left cheek that made the room resound. Thakur feet like returning the compliment. He was apparently defiant. The tutor came down upon him with his cane. The blows fell on his body like a hailstorm. The boy was not prepared for the onslaught. He did not expect it would be so severe as that. It filled him with resentment but the blows did not stay.

"To disobey my orders like that! 'I will kill you, you scoundrel" He did seem to mean what he said. Thakur was afraid and burst into tears, but at the same time went down on his knees.

"When the blows stopped for a bit, and the tutor, all panting went back to give the boy a few kicks that went home, Thakur folded his hands and in tears begged that he should be pardoned, and that he would never again disobey his orders."

"Stand straight," was the next command, which of course he did very promptly this time.

"What am I ?"

Thakur felt like saying he was King-Kong's next of kin, but remembering that his sides were sore and aching terribly, said :

'You are a ma—ahem—a gentleman."

Phut ! came another slap on the left cheek and an even harder kick on the right thigh.

"You fool ! you don't know what I am. Say I am your master."

"You are my master," repeated Thakur.
"And who are you ?"

He did not know what to say ? The master helped him.

"Say you are my slave."
Thakur repeated the words :
"I am your slave."

" Now look here, slave, you have to obey your master's slightest wishes, however disagreeable. Do you understand ?"

Thakur said that he understood that only too well.

"Now strip" was the next command.

"Be a cock, and keep like that for half an hour."

He had been a cock, at school. But then he was only a child and his pliant limbs did not feel the strain. Now high rigid legs could not stay a cock for long, especially because he had placed a weight of five seers on his back, and he expected him neither to shake nor shiver and keep his head upside down and his seat pointed towards the ceiling. Half an hour was much longer than he could stand. He felt like

breaking, but waited patiently for the order to sit up. The clock had struck two when the torture began, and he was patiently waiting for the half hour to strike. The stroke was a long time coming and the strain was almost unbearable. It came at last. His brute of a master was slow in passing the order. He passed it, though.

"Sit up," he said.

Thakur sat up. His back had the cramp.

And there were a thousand and one such devices of torture that suggested themselves to the brutal tutor's ingenious brain. It would not serve any purpose to dilate on them. This sort of life lasted for close on five years, till Thakur was inured to it, and his movements beng restricted and business points explained he could not get into touch with Mira, but was a clever business man by the time he was through. But did he forget his Mira?

"It was silly mistake to suppose that the brute could knock that love out of him. It made the feeling all the more acute. Only the surveillance was so effective, and the chances of his letters miscarrying so many he dare not make the attempt and involve his beloved into trouble.

"Mira's mother might have had her suspicions, but she did not betray them. She was too astute for that. Thakur was the same caste as they. He was very handsome and of a spotless character. He was a fit match for her girl. Only he was a rich man's son. He might expect a rich dowry, far richer than they could afford. With all her little screwing and scraping she had amassed what to her looked like a fortune, but it wasn't enough to satisfy so highly placed a family as Thakur's. Every Indian woman who is worth her salt puts something by in secret from her husband at great personal sacrifice so that it should stand the family in good stead in the hour of need. This hour of need was Mira's wedding. It was hard to obtain a caste perfect match. The few available in the marriage market

demanded too high a price. She would go on hoarding little by little, till she had enough to meet the demands of a bridegroom even of moderate means for her.

"But man proposes and God disposes. She had an attack of cholera and died I need not dwell on the intensity of grief this bereavement caused Mira. She was as it were paralysed. Tears froze within her brain and the anguish of it was too terrible for words. Her father too was terribly shocked, but her four-year-old brother, although at times he cried for his mummy by and by began to look upon his sister as his mummy as w ll.

"Time heals all wounds. It healed Mira's father's too. I think his wound was healed the quicker because of his occupation. One antidote to sorrow is occupation. For Mira it was different. She had no other job than to brood, and she was so grief-stricken it was feared she would be bereft of her reason. The wound was deep, she thought, too deep for healing, but time, by and by, dulled her pain, and although the scar was there all the time, it did not cause the same amount of heartache. Mira's father had a sister, who now came to their house much too frequently. She was dinning into his ear all the time that he should remarry. She had urged that a freshly bereaved widower can easily get a wife. If he sleeps over it brooding, he has to be a widower all the rest of his days. She knew of a very pretty woman who was just the girl for him Father had a little over a thousand rupees of his first wife, which she had been saving to get Mira a husband. He could save more for that purpose. In the meantime why not have a mother for Mira and Manohar, her young brother? Why not have his health and home warmed up once more by the loving care of a very pretty woman? Father allowed himself to be persuaded; and the children had a new mother, a step one, and their father had a new wife, his darling Shamo.

"Yes, she was a darling; but only so long as

she was new to the place. When she had roughed it out a bit, she hardened a whole lot.

"She was a clever woman. She knew how to keep her husband in hand. She dressed herself in a way that pleased his eye. What charmed him was not so much display, as simplicity. She assiduously followed his taste. He was fond of certain dishes more than others. Cauliflower was his first favourite. She prepared cauliflower as a speciality. Her cooking was exceptional. She captured him through his palate. She was a bit of a musician too, and he loved music. It provided for his evening's entertainment. She did not allow any conventional tomfoolery to encroach upon their scanty resources, any superstitious or religious bugbears to rob them of their hard-earned money. She lived *in* the home and *for* the home. She tried to fall in with his wishes so that he felt perfectly at home with her. She sought to keep the flame of love alive by prudence. She kept things tidy, kept regular hours for meals, kept his shoes, his studs, his collar, his towels and napkins, his umbrella, his kerchief, in short everything he would need at any time always handy. She studied his comfort and ministered to it. She never gave him any occasion to grumble, any cause for complaint. Their minds were never inflamed with spleen or distate, and there was never a breach between them. She never claimed to be wiser than her husband. Far from the most obnoxious type whose motto is "Don't I say so," and who lose no opportunity of displaying their wits with which they are least endowed, she was a modest woman. And yet she wasn't servile, Indian husbands are only too apt to hold their wives to a position of serfdom if they exhibit too slavish a mentality. She showed herself self-respecting At least she did not make herself too cheap. She refused to yield her person to him when she did not feel like doing so.

"Mira's stepmother was a model wife. Only she wasn't good to her stepchildren. She wanted them,

out of the way. She was very affectionate to them, outwardly. But at heart she looked upon baby Manohar as a serious rival to her unborn sons; and as for Mira, she too was an unnecessary expense, and now that she was grown up, she was very much in the way. Mira loved Manohar, and so did her father. This was but natural A motherless baby is all the dearer to his people's hearts. And the love of the stepmother appeared to be even greater than than that of a real one. But it wasn't true affection. It was hypocrisy, deceit, duplicity. It was the love of a vamp, with a motive behind it, a highly questionable motive of clearing the way for her own yet unborn children.

"At first she showed great solicitude for Mira. She said she was growing into womanhood, and needed a husband, for otherwise she was likely to grow into an old maid. Mira's father said it could not be helped. He hadn't the necessary funds for her wedding All eligible husbands demanded a big dowry."

"If you leave it to me," she said, "I shall find you the necessary funds."

He left it to her entirely, and she found Mira a husband. This husband was very rich, and a very desirable man, in her eyes. Only he was an old man. He was, in fact, older than Mira's father, and yet he was his son-in law. He paid Mira's father a couple of thousands, and took Mira home as his bride. It was like buying a slave; but Mira was not his slave. He was hers. He doted on her, kissed the very ground she tread. But to Mira this was no consolation. She had parted from her people with tears; she had parted from Manohar with something of a pang. She had some forebodings, presentiment of evil. She was the boy's guardian and now she was leaving him. Anything might happen. The boy was amused with the festivities of her wedding. He was told his sister was going a way. He said he would not let her. He would go with herself. Poor lovely little kid! He did

not know that she was being sold away and that buyers of slaves fight shy of the slaves' old connections. They might be in the way.

Manohar's father pressed him to his heart and kissed him to sleep. He cried when he got up.

"Where is my mum?" he sobbed. He called her sister mum. "I must go to her at once," said he. Nobody listened to him. They let him sob himself to sleep again. How lovely he looked! Poor motherless child! There was no 'mum' near to watch over his sleep, to feed him at regular hours, and keep him presentable. Even his father did not take much notice of him. And the stepmother was callous. His cries could not melt her Her sharp rebuke and withering look effectively silenced him.

A child takes things very much to heart. Manohar did. And in consequence he had an attack of fever which developed into tyhoid. The boy was sent to the hospital. The stepmother told her husband that typhoid is an infectious disease. The child would be better losked after there.

They visited him almost every day. Although fever left at last yet since he was reduced to a skeleton, and the doctor was afraid there might be a relapse, he had not yet been discharged when something happened. Manohar's father was run over by a motor car and killed.

## CHAHTER V

### When Lovers Meet

Mira had now been married sometime. But she was still a virgin. Her man had outlived the period of his usefulness for nature's mission of procreaton. You can imagine the poor girl's plight.

"Could you?" interrupted the Doctor.

"Of course, not," said I, and the Doctor broke forth.

"A girl in that plight has an physical yearning too deep for words. It is even more profound than hunger for food. She is stirred beyond the power of control. She has an intense craving for the sex act. If you refuse her that, do you know what harm you do her? You kill her natural sexual urge, and thereby reduce her vitality It breaks her spirit and make her live through hell.

"I know it only too well, Doctor."

"As for Mira," Mrs. Turner said.

"Her plight was awful. But the husband sought to make amends for it by providing the poor girl with all the luxuries of life. She settled down to that drab existence, but had hardly got used to her new way of life, when the news of her father's death came to her like a bolt from th blue. She had to be the chief mourner with her brother, who had been discharged from the hospital. Sammo too was grieved. Mira was afraid she took it too much to heart. She did not speak with her or with Manohar. Perhaps it was due to the intensity of her grief, or maybe, now that the link between them was broken she wished to have nothing more to do with them. Their feelings were apparently estranged.

"After the thirteenth day of his death, she bade Mira take her brother with her, for she had set her heart on migrating to Hardwar to pass the rest of her days in contemplation, to expiate her sins which had brought on the death of her lord. She disposed of all her property. Even Manohar's toys went with the rest. Then she disappeared from the scene.

"Mira returned to her own home. She took Mahohar with her, and her husband welcomed the boy. He took such a violent fancy to the boy, he actually proposed that he should adopt him as his own son. He asked Mira about it and Mira had no objection, of course. So Manohar became Ghasi Ram's adopted son. The old man said he

would inherit all his property, save the jewels and cash in the bank, which would come to Mira. A will was drawn up and it was to be registered on the first day of *Phagan* which the Brahmins had pronounced auspicious.

"These illiterate people, whether men of money or poor folk, are guided in all their actions by the movements of the planets. The matter of the registration of the will was of such importance that even a moment's delay was dangerous, especially because Ghashi Ram was a very old man. But even in this matter the Pandit must have his say, and this time he had his say once too often. Before the dawn of the first of *Phagan* Ghasi Ram died, and to Mira's horror the will made by her husband could nowhere be traced. The lock of the safe was intact. The jewels and cash and the will were missing. Mira beat her breast, tore her hair and lamented this loss even more than the loss of her husband, although that loss too was irrevocable.

"The police took the matter in hand. They did their best and said they couldn't do more. They were right. Who can do more than his best? But no trace of the thief or thieves could be found.

"So Mira was both widowed and pauperised. The collaterals were very polite but very insistent that she should vacate the ancestral hall to make their possession absolute in the eyes of the law. They could give her money if she needed it to make a new home. Her husband's cash account could not be allowed to operate in her name, unless she could prove to the satisfaction of the manager that she was Ghasi Ram's widow, and Ghasi Ram had intended to leave his money to her. She had to apply to the Deputy Commissioner for the necessary certificate, and prove to that officer's satisfaction that a will had originally been made by her husband to the effect that the whole of the movable property of her husband was to pass to her. But this will had unfortunately been stolen. A pleader to whom she was taken by a kindly neighbour said that will or no will

she had still a right to the jewels and cash, and promissed to help her. He bade her call again, and he would draft an application for her and have it field on her behalf. She sent the neighbour, but the pleader wanted her to be present personally to explain a few points and also to affix her thumb impression or sign her name. She went alone as Manohar was asleep, and met him in his office. She had some misgivings of the lawyer's intentions, but you are not supposed to look a gift horse in the mouth, and when you are a pauper your sense of honour is supposed to be dulled, if not deadened. This was the lawyer's idea : but he had reckoned without the host. Mira was much to sensitive to yield to his overtures. She threw away her chances of coming into her husband's money. She said good-bye to her husband's home, and came to Jandiala to meet some old relations on her mother's side There were two uncles. She tried them one by one, each for a week. Their wives just tolerated them. And once when Manohar and one of her cousins quarrelled, her aunt passed such caustic remarks as to break her spirit. She said Mira was making nuisance of herself, and added that every catastrophe that descended from Heaven made its way straight to their home. It was just their ill-luck. This was more than flesh and blood could endure. So one night when all were asleep she left their home and boarded the train for Ludhiana.

"This was when we met at the mission hospital. I was receiving training as a midwife and assistant. She brought her brother who was suffering from bronchitis. Miss Todd was the doctor-in-charge. She was as usual very sympathetic.

"What can I do for you, child ?" she asked.

"I have brought my little brother who has a bad cough," said Mira.

Miss Todd examined the boy, and remarked, "Very bad throat. Tonsils enlarged. I am afraid he has caught the chill. Couldn't you keep him here as an indoor patient. He might develop some

serious disorder of the lungs, if not carefully looked after."

"And I too have some pain, here," sho said pointing to her chest. I was asked to examine her. I took her temperature. She had a high fever and having caught the chill was going to have a cogestion of her right lung. I told Miss Todd so, and both were admitted as indoor patients.

"The boy was soon up and about, and being a lovely cheery child was popular with us all. The girl hung between life nnd death, and it was through a miracle that we snatched her through the jaws of death. She was well over three months in the hospital before she was well again. She had become so friendly with me, she confessed to me the whole story of her life. I persuaded her to go through a course of midwifery which she took and together we came to Lahore We practised together, I as a doctor and she as a midwife and assistant. One day as she was sitting in my office, I having been called away, she had visitor who wanted her to go go with him on an urgent case. She went, of course. It was a pretty young girl who the man said was his wife. But it seems that he was a wicked man. He wanted Mira to help the girl out of her difficulty. It was her third month, and she did not want the child. He would pay handsomely.

"I had explained to Mira that this prental infanticide is the most heinous sin ever committed. Even if the conception was a few seconds old, abortion is tantamount to murder as sure as if the child lay dead in her arms. For according to science life is present as soon as the male cell and the female egg cell unite. No Hindu girl will ever be a party to taking the life even of an ant, leave alone a human child. She is non-violent by nature. Her religion fobids taking life.

"Eactly," interjected the Doctor.

"But you can't deny," I put in, "that there are stray cases of abortion in this country too."

"Stray cases only, mark you, stray cases, like exception that prove a rule. This country is chaste enough, I mean comparatively. I admit there are a few scoundrels who have crept even into our holy places. The innocent maidens are easily taken in by them, in the grab of religion. There are some wolves in sheep's clothing who do our streets disguised as ascetic. They too, excite lust among our ignorant women and to bless them with children they deprive them of their chastity. I admit also that large number of hotels brothel houses are doing a lot of damage to the cause of virtue, and this speed of female education which in now the rage also helps our girls to take up ways that lead to vice. And these girls of shame do seek to save their honour by going to a midwife to help them out of the difficulty. But these dregs of society are by no means the product of Indian culture. They may be a special feature of other culture than ours."

"Mrs. Turner continued Mira's story. She said:

"Mira refused point blank to have anything to do with it. She threatened to report her for trespass. They were in runk. They rang up the police and had her apprehended for larceny. The news went the round of the press, and this brought to our doors Thakur himself, He stood bail for Mira and got her honourably acquitted, and through my intercession their romance was renewed. Now they are man and wife.

"Isn't this an example of how romantic love turned out to be true love after all?"

## CHAPTER VI

### The Tragedy of Reckless Living

"Champa was to be wedded. This wedding was intended to be an orthodox, rather prosaic affair—you

understand what I mean—leading a girl by the nose and tacking her on to the shoe-laces of a man who is totally a stranger."

"You mean it was not the outcome of what they call romantic love ?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, it was by no means a romance, but thanks to Mrs. Turner's good offices, Chandu Lal was brought from Cawnpore where he was a manager in his father's sugar factory, and introduced to Champa. They had an hour's talk, and I understand they were thoroughly satisfied with each other.

"It wasn't really giving the two an opportunity to judge for themselves if they were really fit for each other. An hour, you will admit, is hardly time enough for that. Even a year of the co-called *companionate* marriage would not be time enongh It was only to enable each to see if the other was just tolerable. As to the rest, my aunt's spies had made sure of his being the right sort of man for our Champa. Mrs. Turner was for keeping him at Delhi for a week at least. She proposed that they should have a boating excursion on a moonlit night all by themselves. But Champa was too shy for that, and in spite of Chandu Lal's solicitude refused to be drawn into their plan. Chandu Lal was impressed by her beauty and modesty: and she was carried away his general deportment. When I asked her after he was gone how she liked him, she blushed deeply as if to admit he was her knight; but she did not say that in so many words. I think Indian convention of letting the parents find out for the girl if her groom is the right man for her is good as it goes. Only it needs to be amended a little. Let the bride and the bridegroom meet for an hour and talk it over and get their first impression of each other at least a month before the wedding to enable them to make up their minds about each other during that month. And let the final choice be theirs. Place all the facts before them, but let them give the last word themselves.

'As if," interjected the Doctor, "the young folks' judgment could be depended on."

"Let matrimony take place late enough for the young folks to have a mature judgment," I commented.

"Please go ahead."

"The bridal procession was a glamorous affair. The military band was in attendance. There were three hundred guests in about one hundred taxis. In beautifully adorned trucks on tastefully decorated wooden platforms were the prettiest dancing girls and musicians. One of these who hailed from London was the prettiest of the lot. Mrs. Turner pointed her out to me and said. 'Do you see that pretty girl?"

"The nautch-girl there? O, I can see her well enough. She is a degraded woman. Auntie calls a girl who is dressed rather gaudily, a nautch-girl. The other day I asked what a nautch-girl was and she explained that a nautch-girl is a degraded woman."

"Your aunt isn't right. A nautch-girl is not at all a degraded woman. She is quite chaste enough. Dancing is an art, and so is music. These girls are called artistes. They are highly honoured in civilised society. I do not take exception to Mohini's music or dancing. But I am afraid she has gone the way of a prostitute. These Indian dancing girls think nothing of selling their person for cash. Mohini was the jolliest girl I ever met."

"So you are familiar with the dancing girl?" I asked.

"Quite. She was my patient."

"Could't you tell me more about her?"

"I don't know much about the woman. When I was at Lahore, she came to me as a patient. She had been drugged by some silly midwife. This had brought about a miscarriage, or may be it was

purposely done. It might have been an abortion, but it had left her in a terrible way, I snatched her from the jaws of death so to speak "

When there was a lull in the musical display, and Mohini was going to retire to participate in the treat that awaited them, Mrs. Turner accosted her and brought her to me. She was attractive, with a magnetic personality. I was simply charmed at the way she spoke. She wanted to be friendly and invited us to tea on the day after the wedding.

Mrs. Turner gladly accepted her invitation and promised to bring me with her.

The wedding terminated, and Champa's dowry was spread out for exhibition. Every woman in the town who counted came to see this dowry, which according to Mrs. Turner's estimate must have cost aunt nothing less than ten thousand rupees. Champa took her seat in a beautifully decorated motor-car and left us in tears

A gloom settled on the house afterr her departure, and the next day when Mrs. Turner asked me to get ready for tea at Mohini place, I welcomed the opportunity of a change. By the way, I should explain, that my sexual rhythm of passion too had commenced, and that was the day when I could be easily excited. Mohini looked deliciously sweet, and she was in a tell-tale mood. She could be persuaded to relate the most astounding, more sensational story of her life as follows :—

I was born out of wedlock. Who my father was I was never told, but my erring mother clung to me to the end. She was a woman of sin, but she was firm. Some kill such children as I, even a month or two after their conception. Some unscrupulous midwife seeking to help them out of their difficulty administers to them a drug that in 99 cases of 100 costs them their life. Mother must have known all the time the consequences of bearing a natural child. Her friends must have

suggested a thousand and one ways out, but either she was too firm to yield, or too cowardly to do the act that might have endangered her life. The fact remains. I was allowed to see the light of day and grow up, in spite of adverse circumstances, healthy, beautiful girlhood. Once I remember, out of sheer curiosity, I asked mother where my father was. She slapped my cheek and bade me hold my tongue. He must have wronged her terribly, for she did not like me to refer to him, and whenever I attempted to introduce him into a scowl, and if I persisted, she slapped my cheeks and pulled my nose and ears and pigtail, pinching me all over till I began to cry with pain.

It seems that in spite of her profession of love she was in a way fed up with me. Maybe she was a sadist and revelled in watching a pretty girl in distress, just as some people revel in watching a beauty in tears. I could not have been more than eight, when she wedded a schoolmaster, who was such a devilish drunken brute that he actually used the lash on her. He seemed to revel in debauchery, and it was terribly cruel to my mother, as he gave her no peace. He relished seeing her in pain. He was the devil incarnate.

Here the Doctor interrupted me saying:

"This is the question of the day. Men mishandle women, as though they had a Divine right over them They seek a few minutes of physical pleasure every night, and so either oppress their wives against their will, committing rape, or failing that, go to a prostitute and contract venereal diseases of a very acute type

"They simply will not exercise self control. They are not made of the stuff that will hold itself in. They are much too passionate. Denied the society of their wives they go to a prostitute, or have wet dreams ar even take to the habit of self-abuse, by which process the sperms and secretions are entirely lost. They say these minute male cells or sperms, invisible to the naked eye, that flow out at one ejaculation number something like fifty lakhs. Each is capable of fertilising one

female egg cell. Each can bring forth a human being. Thus one single ejaculation can fertilise fifty lakhs of women of a marriageable age, and add to the population of the world by as many people. And a waste of it is tantamount to taking almost as many lives. Besides the sperms, the fluid carries away the most precious substance of the body in the shape of calcium and phosphoric acid. The loss weakens the brain. Each act must be tenderly wooed for and won. It means the woman is to be excited and roused to sexual union before the act takes place. I believe you know that!"

"Quite well."

"And you know it means premature death for the poor wife to violate this rule."

"Yes."

"Pray proceed with the story."

"Such reckless conduct makes a woman sterile," Mohini continued. "I do not know if it did my mother. It made her consumptive, though. And after a year of lingering illness she died.

"I was then ten. The only home I know was my stepfather's. He was very kind to me for a spell. This was, I suppose, to let my sorrow heal. It was quite healed by and by. My stepfather meanwhile treated me as though I was his real daughter. One day he said to me :

"Mohini dear, don't you think I should provide you with a little bit of education, so that when you go to your husband's you should be able to write and tell me all about yourself, and read the news and keep in touch with the world."

I welcomed the suggestion and asked him to teach me something. He was such a wonderful teacher, he soon set me on the path to learning things by myself, so that my eagerness for knowledge grew a pace. Further steps were difficult, and I could not respond to his efforts quite as satisfactorily as he wished me to. So he said one day :

"It is no use working on you. You do not work yourself. I am afraid I cannot proceed unless I adopt the lines I follow at school, If a boy does not obey me, I pinch his nose and slap his cheeks so hard that it sounds like an explosion. I make them strip and thrash them so hard that there are weals all over their bodies. They obey me in all particulars. They serve me like a slave, Whatever I bid them do they do. If you want to continue, I shall have to follow the same lines on you."

"I don't mind if you do," said I.

"Well," said he, "then you will have to be thrashed as though you were a boy. Do you agree?"

I thought he was joking, and if he thought it was the only way, why it could not deter me from making a bid for reading and writing.

"One thing more. Will you do all I bid you do without a question."

"You may safely depend on my implicit obedience." I put in?"

"You will not bring in any lame excuse, will you?"

"Not at all."

"Even if my tortures cause you great anguish?"

"I won't mind."

"You pledge me your word of houour?"

"I do."

"I did not realise the gravity of giving such a pledge to a callous rogue His strokes were harder than a thief can bear with equanimity. He pinched my nose and cheeks and ears with callousness. He thrust pencils into my nostrils and then squeezed my nose. He thrust pencils in between my fingers and then pressed them hard. He made me strip and be a cock, so that he slashed my seat and almost all the parts

of my body with a thin piece of cane. He devised a hundred and one forms of torture for my feeble frame so that there were weals all over and blood clotted.

"Remember that I was an innocent girl used to a hard life. Remember that I was ignorant of any knowledge of sex. I did not know that some scoundrels indulge in self-abuse so recklessly as to wreck their youthful lives. My stepfather was such a scoundrel. He was not a youth but he was well on the way to wrecking his life and six months later he did wreck his life completely. This was how it happened. He had a full meal, and somehow got himself unduly excited and that was his undoing. He fell into a fainting fit. When they roused him, he was raving mad. They removed him to the Mental Hospital.

"As for me, I was admitted to an orphanage and widows' home."

The Doctor remarked.

"This evil practice after a full meal, in fact, any form of ejaculation when the stomach is full, is extremely dangerous. This form of self-abuse so excessively indulged leads to serious consequences.

"The preliminary result is premature ejaculation. If a certain victim of this disease seeks to restrain himself, he finds it impossible to do so, for an irritation of the prostate glands, and seminal vehicles sets in. This produces a tension in the organ, which can be relieved only by ejaculation, which take place at once. The consequence is total exhaustion of the sexual centres and subsequent neurosis, or impotency or lunacy, or paralysis."

## CHAPTER VII

### A House of Sin

"These orphanage! What a terrible lot is that of the inmates! Their first feeling is that they are

there by sufferance. How they came to have that feeling, I do not know. But the feeling is there, that it is no more their home than the prison is the home of the prisoner. They have to go in parties to beg for their food. They have to drudge all the day to keep the premises clean. They have to wait on the office-bearers attending to their slightest wishes. They have to have no scruples doing their bid. They have to have no voice of their own and have slavishly to obey the commands of their superiors. Their teachers are under the impression that these boys are hardened toughs, for any sensitiveness that was left in them after the death of their parents must have been dulled and deadened by now. I remember a little boy aged seven being badly kicked by a teacher for not being able to bring out a tune in music which he was expected to learn by the next evening so that he should be better able to satisfy his patrons at a charity concert. The kick landed in his stomach, causing him such severe anguish as almost to suffocate him. He turned purple. and fainted right away. The *vaidya*-in-charge took it as a mere nothing, as though such things happened to an orphan in the day's work. There were some pretty boys and girls among them who were not orphans really, but whom they kept for show. One was the Head Master's daughter, about twelve years of age, rather pretty who went about with them to rich men's houses to make an impression, so that they should think so much the better of our orphanage and make handsome contribution towards our keep. This girl whose name was Pushpa was invited by a youthful patron to call for a cheque at nine in the evening The Head Master knew what the fellow's motive was. He obviously could not send his own daughter. He sent me instead. I was a noviceo so they explained everything to me. I was to make every effort to squeeze money out of the man. I was to be polite at all costs, and in no way to offend him. I was to make all sacrifices to get a substantial cheque.

My stepfather had ruthlessly played with my feelings. So I had no scruples as to that. But unhappily I was in a sullen uncompromising mood least inclined to be trifled with that day. My desire to be made a plaything had reached the freezing point.

"I was admitted to his drawing-room with a servant of the institution. He was very cross with the servant, and ordered him out of the room. I was going to follow suit, but he very politely bade me wait for the cheque. He said he could not bear the sight of a servant on his rich Persian carpets. My case was different. Nothing was too good for a delicate girl such as I was, He invited me to a seat on the sofa. I said I was in a hurry. Would he mind making out a cheque at once.

"O, a cheque! said he, "I was very nearly for getting your business. But my cheque book is in the adjoining room. Would you mind coming with me to my study? I shall make out a cheque for a substential amount. The orphanage which has a little maiden such as you deserves to be pulled up. There was a glint in his eyes, which I did not half like, and if I could, I would certainly have given him a wide berth. But beggars are no choosers, so I followed him to the other room which was his bedroom. He held me by the wrist and pulled me on to a bed, but I resisted like fury, and even though he was much too strong for me, I had my way, and the beauty of it was I was still in his good books. It was a terrible ordeal, though.

"Next morning when I talked it over with Pushpa, she said she knew the scoundrel. She had overheard her father's remark that he left no virgin unravished.

"Then why did you not tell me?" I asked.

"I never knew you were going," she replied. "If I had known, I would certainly have warned you. Did he give you a cheque?"

"Yes," I said, "for a couple of hundreds. But he is a regular brute."

I was so much in demand by that brute, and the Head Master's orders were so peremptory each time, I became the regular keep of the scoundrel.

Not only was I his keep, but also the keep of so many others in the city who cared to partronise the institution. Meanwhile, I mastered the art of music and with the help of a friendly neighbour made appointments on mine own, and began to grow rich. I accepted an appointment at Lahore, where I decided to stay for good.

Mohini begged that I should visit her at Lahore. We were mutually attracted, and had it not been for Mrs. Turner I would have visited her every day. I saw her thrice on the sly, before she left for Lahore.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Fruit of Love

Champa returned from her husband's house to celebrate her first conception ceremony. She was happy, and that is saying a great deal. In this country few wives are happy with a mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law was the usual type But her husband was what they call hen pecked. He was totally under his wife's thumb. So even though his mother tried to poison him against her, he had it all in at one ear and out at the other. That didn't spoil her though, for she was a sensible girl. She left no stone unturned to keep her husband in perfect peace and comfort. She never quarrelled with her mother-in-law. If she had any cause of complaint, she simply told her husband, and bade him forget all about it. And he was a diplomat. He handled the situation in such a way as never to give his mother the impression that someone had been speaking against her. He got her to confess and then set things right between them.

Champa had succeeded not only in netting her husband's heart but also in caging it. And this was how

she happened to be the queen of her home in spite of her mother-in-law.

One morning during the celebration Champa comp'ained of nausea. Mrs. Turner said.

" It is morning sickness. A glass of hot milk in the morning before being up and about is all that is required to effect a speedy cure."

" But what is the matter with her ?" I asked.

" She has conceived " replied Mrs. Turner.

" How do you know ?" I asked.

" Those freckle-like marks on her brow and her cheeks, called the 'mask of pregnancy,' betray her. Besides, there are dark rings under her eyes, and the veins can be plainly seen on the breasts."

" And how about her now ?" was my next question.

" We have to look to her diet. She should eat nothing but cereals and fresh fruit and vegetables and hnve as much milk as possible. She should drink plenty of water too. Her clothes should be loose. No compression of the *saree* round the waist is allowed. Let her take as many baths as she likes to promote excretion by the skin. Let her carry on the common work of the house by way of a light exercise. No violent exercise is allowed. Let her have plenty of rest and mark you, she must not be fatigued. No disagreeable sights or news for her. Let her surrounding be cheerful, and her diversions pleasant. Let her keep beautiful pictures about her and listen to delightful music.

" If she follows these instructions, her labour will be easy. Let her remember also that during the first two months the physical nature of the little one is formed. Let her therefore pay special attention to light physical exercise but let her exercise be pleasant. Let her keep a beautitful picture in view. Let her carry the image of the beautiful person in the picture in her head, always. The child will be the image of that person.

"During the third and fourth months, the little one develops love of home and family. Let her exercise this love by making her home the prettiest object in the world. During the fifth and sixth months the little one has his power of observation grafted. Let her then exercise observation. Let her observe the beauties of nature and of art. During the seventh and eighth months the little one develops constructive and beautifying powers. Let her give full play to these. During the last stage the little one develops religious aspirations. Let her then be more religious, benevolent, charitable.

"If she can manage all that, do you know what the child would be? The most ideal specimen of humanity. He would be the prettiest little boy, intellectually a genius, and a hero among men."

"But are you attending to these things Champa?"

"You know she has a well-aired sleeping room with beautiful surroundings. We give her rice and milk, baked potatoes, pudding, spinach, greens, celery peas, asparagus, oranges, grapes and other fresh fruits and vegetables. She has a few mouthfuls of food and cup of milk before getting out of bed. Vomiting appeared yesterday, and I found that it was due to a displaced uterus. I effected a magic cure by simply replacing it. She avoids sugary, fatty or starchy food. She is the subject of tender solicitude and care. I keep her bowels open. She is made to sip hot water slowly half an hour before each meal and thus is free from constipation."

If was for fully a week that the ceremonies went on, but Mrs. Turner did not lose sight of Champa. She kept her jolly, well amused, and let her pass through physical exercises that made us laugh, they were so funny. It was like a holiday. But the festivities were interrupted by Chandu Lal coming to Delhi to fetch Champa away.

Mrs Turner told me the fellow was over-sexed. He had no patience. But Mrs. Turner somehow succeeded

in persuading him to leave Champa alone during the period of her pregnancy at the earlier part of childbirth. She promised to give him a son that, would be so handsome the world would stop and stare and so wise that he would be proud of him. He willy-nilly agreed to let her have her way

She told me the doctors did not object to sexual congress during the fifth and sixth months of gestation, but she would much rather the husband exercised a bit of self-control. Only then could an ideal child be born.

Champa had a three-coloured plate of a beautiful baby which Mrs. Turner had torn for her out of an American magazine. Champa loved this lovely little baby, so that she never lost sight of the picture On inquiry she told Mrs. Turner the baby had such a hold on her mind she carried not only his picture about her person, but also his image engraven on her heart. She had her diet regulated, so that *khir* and *phirni* (rice boiled in milk) formed her principal articles of food. She abstained from the use of things fried in oil and condiments. She said she felt the right ovum had been impregnated by the right sperm, which indicated the birth of a male child. How she managed to conclude that it was a boy I could not understand although she tried to explain that to me in detail. It had something to do with the little one's movements in the womb.

During the various stages of Champa's pregnancy, Mrs. Turner so arranged a programme of her diversions as to give her the fullest exercise in the sort of development that the little one was passing through. It was not at all tedious. I think to have a trained and experienced midwife in the house at the time of pregnancy is a rare treat.

At last the hour of "deliverance" arrived.

Mrs Turner had calculated the day and the hour she roughly explained by counting nine months and seven days ahead of the last menstruation. Her

bowels had not moved freely that day, so they were moved by a full enema. No one was allowed into the room who hadn't a cheery word to say and a bright face to give strength to the word. No one was allowed to whisper. The first stage of labour began with the opening of the uterus, ready for the expulsion of the child.

Mrs. Turner bade Champa keep cool, jolly, and cheerful, and all would go well. Then there was a natural desire to bear down with pain. Mrs. Turner had prepared a mixture of one part alcohol, two parts chlorofrom, and three parts ether. She took a light drinking glass, filled it half full of absorbent cotton and dropped a few drops of the mixture upon it. Champa was made to hold the glass and take half a dozen full breaths. The deliverance was painless, a source of joy. She was surprised at the ease of labour.

After half an hour's rest followed the expulsion of placenta. The little one was a boy plump and lovely, Champa hugged him to her heart for joy, and so did we all.

The strangest part of the story remains to be told. The baby grew up and Champa one day showed me the picture she always carried about her. The subject of the picture and Champa's baby were absolutely alike the same eyes, the same sharp little tilted nose, the same rounded chin, the same bookish face. They were indentically alike.

"Do you mean to suggest," I asked, "that all the pretty boys and girls that we see in this country are the product of the principles of sexual science as exponded by you? This idea of carrying the impress of a lovely person on the mind, I believe, is new to this country. That it is irrefutable goes without saying, for I have seen it work with my own eyes, in Moti's case—Moti was the name of Champa's baby. But you see very few in this country have had the opportunity of watching such expeiments much less carrying them out, and yet there are pretty persons in this country

too. I should like you to explain how it happens to be the case."

She replied, "Some persons are born of romantic matches. A square-peg-in-a-round-hole match which thanks to your crass conventions is here the rule, assisted by the oppressions and repressions of the mother-in-law making the wife's life miserable even during the course of pregnancy, when she is expected to make a regular holiday of it, is responsible for the plainness of our children. I am of opinion that the few pretty boys and girls you see are due to the coincidence of here and there a pretty woman fall'ng to the lot of a handsome man, each being absorbed in the other. They take after their parents, of course, proving the principle established by sexual science.

I heard from an old acquaintance, a zemindar to-day, whose grandson now aged ten is the loveliest boy I have ever come across His mother who was my patient, and who was the loveliest creature on earth died in the throes of labour, not because she was weak or ailing. but because of society's persecution. She made up her mind to die and purposely lost all grip on life. The result was haemorrhage and death, of course. The husband who was perhape the handsomest fellow alive was murdered by a Pandit. The child had to have a wet nurse. I found one for him. His grandfather, who was my employer before I came to England with the boy, so that he should have the best of University Education. I brought round the grandfather to this point, even when the child was a year old.

" But you aren't leaving me surely. Why, I should lose all hold on life as the other girl did, and purposely die, if you left me !"

"It should not be so bad, as that, my girl. I have got to go for anot er reason too. I have received information that my husband died last year, and he had taken out an insurance, of which I am now the

sole beneficiary. I must go and claim it. But I shall not go till I have seen you happily wedded.

"Now it is an accomplished fact. I have seen the youth with my own eyes. He is very handsome, and you are very pretty, and the outcome of this match is bound to be the children of my dreams."

"Oh! drop that subject, please. You were just telling me something about the pretty baby."

**The Tragedy of a Well-matched Couple.**

You would hear of that! Very well, than I shall relate this most sensational story. Adhampur is a village in the neighbourhood of Delhi. The squire of this village is one Jagat Narain, a very well to-do landed proprietor. This squire had a son whose name was Davinder Lal. I saw Devinder Lal with my own eyes, and I can tell you I never set eyes on a handsomer fellow than he or one possessed of a lovelier disposition. He was an undergraduate, and was a student of some Lahore college through which he had sat for his Degree Examination. He was motherless, and was the only son of his father who doted on him. They had a man-servant named Surjan, a Punjabi Brahmin, who was a crafty fellow, and had somehow got a great hold on the zemindar, so great, in fact, he was all in all in the house, being his counsellor friend, as well as butler and manager of the estate.

This crafty Brahmin knew how to fleece the tenants on the one hand and his master on the other, and between them he was fast growing rich, of course at their expense. And yet he posed before both as a much aggrieved party, before the tenants as a much down-trodden poor wretch who must work night and day to carry out his master's behests on a very low salary, and before his master as a work-ridden tenant-reviled wretch who must bear and forbear a lot.

He never turned his hand to anything, but when after six hours' sleep under the trees, he returned home, he sought to impress upon his master that he had

been totally exhausted with a hard day's work, so hard that it had almost broken his back. He continuously complained that times were hard, and that a rupee did not go so far now as it used to in his father's time, and yet his father under the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh drew a much higher salary than he did.

Jagat Narain, the zemindar knew how to flatter the Brahmin but he let his importunities go in at one ear and out at the other. Not becaucse he hated the man, he liked him a great deal, but because he was a skinflint, and a skinflint sooner parts with his life-blood than with his money.

It was the harvest season. The harvesters were on move seeking a job. They are a nomadic tribe called *Sansies*. They come with their families and kit, and set up an encampment in the village common, where they stay during the harvest season. They never stay in a camp longer than three months.

These *Sansies* or gypsies, a tribe of pariahs, are treated in some parts of the country as a criminal tribe, their movements being recorded in the registers of the local police. They sometimes go about as acrobats, their ladies begging their way through the country; and I have learnt from a reliable source, kidnapping little children, mostly girls and when they are grown up carrying on traffic in women.

One such band came to Adhampur and the zemindar being too a high personage to be approached by a pariah, Surjan, his manager, took upon himself the responsibility of accommodating them in one of the mango *topes*, the favoured sport of Davinder Lal, for it was near this place he used to sit. sometimes all day reading a novel. Davinder saw the place occupied by a number of families. He enjoyed watching them at work, preparing their evening meal. He watched the females gather at the bank of the Jamuna which bordered on their farm He hungrily watched a youthful maiden who, although her complexion was tanned, had such marvellous feafures, she simply held him spell-

bound. Davinder tried to hold himself in. The girl was a pariah. He turned away from her and took his seat in a bower away from the camp. But he could not keep his seat for long. He was fidgety. He got up to go home but directed his steps to the camp. He saw the girl in a delightful pose. Her beauty was ravishing. It was a pose he carried engraved in his heart. It was deliciously thrilling.

He did not enjoy much of sleep that night. He was thinking of the gypsy girl in that delightful pose. The image moved him, but then the thought that she was a pariah got on his nerves. He slowly came to be afflicted with the malady they call love, that knows no caste or creed or class conventions that takes root in all the soils, affecting the rich and the poor alike. There is another thing about love. It is magnetic in its influ-nce. Davinder loved the gypsy girls. She was his magnet. None can explain how Davinder became her, magent, too. I think where there is true love, this mutual magnetism appears automatically. In some cases the forces that attract also begin to repel, and this repulsion somehow becomes so powerful that attraction is subdued for the time being. Give it the fullest play, and this evaporates giving free and full scope to mutual attraction. One can never understand how this mutual attraction leads the lovers to meet each other at places they are least expected to haunt. Davinder and the girl whose name he l arnt was Parmo came to meet each other on the bank of the Jamuna far away from the *Ghat.* They vowed to be true to each other. Parmo told him she was a pariah and it wasn't right that he should love a pariah if his only subject was to ravish the poor girl, and not enter into matrimony with her. A poor helpless girl, be she of the lowest caste, values her chastity as much as a high-caste girl. It has been noted that among savages and other illtrate people they attach all the importance in the world to this one virtue of chastity. A civilised educated girl, less afflicted with superstitious

fear of the fire of hell will walk into the parlour of a scoundrel readily enough, walking out again, deprived of her virtue without compunction. She will tell you she understands the maxim: "If character is lost all is lost," but this loss to her does not constitute the loss of her character which in her eyes is a many-sided virtue, chastity being one of the least important sides.

Parmo was chaste. She would have nothing to do with a child of passion who would play with her as though she were a toy so that when he had got all the fun he wanted out of her, when she ceased to be enjoyable, he would throw her over as though she were a discarded shoe. She told him she loved him with all the fervour she was capable of, and believed him when he said he loved her more, for he was a man and as such far stronger then she was physically, and emotionally, too. But she wanted a tangible proof of his love. Let him wed her and make her legally his slave. Then and only then could she show him the length to which she could go in her wifely devotion.

But how was a wedding to be arranged. His father would be dead against such a step. Hers would be equally antagonistic. If they eloped they would be felons in the eyes of the law. No bonds of wedlock were binding without their guardian's consent. They racked their brains - Davinder did, but no solution offered itself.

He had a friend at Lahore who was a Samajist. He had once told him how the Samaj converted an untouchable into a high caste Hindu. He had added that if it was a girl, she was offered for marriage to an eligible candidate. His friend's father might agree to help them, posing as the girl's guardian and the wedding might still come off. So he wrote a letter to his friend explaining everything. He bade her give her people the slip and proceed to Lahore with him

They were missed one winter morning. The zemindar thought this wayward son must have paid

a flying visit to Delhi to relieve the tedium of his long wait for the University result. He might have been delayed at a friend's. A loving father does have a premonition of danger coming to his son, a presentiment of evil which he is unable to analyse, a danger which he cannot forestall, and a sort of heaviness comes over his heart, but hope deceives him into believing all may be well, and he is reassured for a spell. But then the process is repeated, till hope deferred makes the heart sick.

The *Sansi* father was more deeply concerned. His modest child could not give herself away by eloping with that zemindar puppy He was afraid he might have been carried away by a fit of sexual craziness and the girl might have been hurt, perhaps seriously. He waited till midnight, and then in his heart of hearts feeling something must have happened to his child, he hastened to the zemindar's house, and easily awakened the zemindar who was tossing in bed and said he hadn't enjoyed a wink of sleep, since his son had not turned up since morning. Here was an opportunity to make a hit and the *Sansi* availed himself of it. He said his daughter whom the boy was said to be seducing had also been missing since morning. He was afraid he had enticed her away, and she was his only child dearer to him than his own life.

"My son entice your daughter!" thundered the zemindar, "You must be crazy to think of that."

The crafty Brahmin who had heard the conversation asked the *Sansi* if he wasn't a pariah. The *Sansi* could not deny it.

"My God! And Davinder has run away with a *malecchh*!" remarked Surjan.

"Stuff and nonsense," interrupted the zemindar, "He has done nothing of the kind, My son has to run away like that? I would murder him first. My unsophisticated child! And this silly scoundrel to accuse him of such a dastardly act. Away with you, you son

of a dog " He threatened him with a *lathi*, but the aggrieved father stood his ground.

" You may kill me *Maharaj*, if it pleases you to do so. But I am not going to stir out of here till I am told where your son could possibly have gone. You must surely know his haunts."

Hot words passed on the zemindar's side. The *Sansi* was obsequious, but at the same time obdurate. He was sure Davinder had kidnapped his child. He had often seen them together in whispers for a few minutes, the *Sansi* putting in a casual remark that he had been done for. When they returned, the Pandit politely explained to the *Sansi* that they themselves were unaware of Davinder's whereabouts, and they were prepared to make it worth his while to sleep over the loss of his daughter till such time as the youth and the girl were traced. They paid him something on aceount, and he disappeared shedding before them a few crocodile tears. When he had passed out of sight, he felt the touch of something in his waistband, and smiled.

Davinder and Parmo travelled as far as Shaharanpur and from there they went straightway to Hardwar. Their funds would not allow of a longer journey. When they got to Hardwar they found they had reached the end of the tether. They had a few pice between them, and they were on the verge of starvation. As they trudged on their way to the city, they were approached by a mendicant, who begged alms. He said he was half dead with hunger. Parmo who had herself experienced tke pangs of hunger so many times, knew what it felt having to beg for food with an empty stomach, took a pice out of her pocket and handed it out to him saying. " This is all I have in the world.'

"Wait my child," said he, "You do look starving. Come to my place, both of you, I am a Pandit. I shall give you a good feed and you can stay at my place as long as you are here.

This was a treat. They availed themselves of it,

The Pandit had taken a fancy to them at first sight, and asked them if they were married. They confessed they weren't. He asked if they wanted to get married, and took them to his Head Pandit who agreed to unite them in wedlock. provided that Davinder became his disciple. His sect did not believe in celibacy.

So Dav nder was initiated. He became a devoted *chela*, was duly married to Parmo and began to live like a prince. These *Pandas*, as they are called, who beg o every pilgrim are so well-to-do they can buy these pilgrims who tip them. And the Head *Panda* is a regular chief, and his disciples are veritable princes.

Surjan was sent to look for Davinder He went to Lahore. He was directed to his friends. One confessed he had received a letter from Davinder to the effect that Parmo should be converted. He had not turned up, however Surjan stayed there for slx months. At last one of Davinder's friends brought news to Surjan that Davinder was a *Panda* at Hardwar. A zemindar *Panda* was an unheard of thing. But the fellow said he had seen him with his own eyes

So Surjan went to Hardwar. He met Davinder. He tried to persuade him to go with him to Adhampur. Davinder refused. He coaxed his wife and him to listen to reason, but Davinder was adamant. He refused to return to his old associatio .s Surjan threatened to expose them to the Head *Panda*. Davinder did not care. He told the *Panda* that Davinder was pollute. He had been in sexual contact with a pariah woman. The Head *Panda* was abashed. He had admitted him into his home. He had let him dine on the same floor. Davinder did not deny it. The Head *Panda* burst forth like a volcano. Davinder made some sort of a plea wh'ch so infuriated him, he hit him on the head with a *lathi*, It stunned the boy. They removed him to a doctor's place, but he did not regain consciousness, and died of a heart-failure. *I* believe.

The girl was taken home, and even as she stepped into the zemindar's home. she gave birth to a boy, a joy not unmixed with sorrow for soon after the child's birth, Parmo died. I saw her die before my own eyes, and provided the child with a wet nurse.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Wages of Sin

An auspieious day for a wedding !

Mrs. Turner, who had now left us to proceed to England with Davinder's son, used to say, "All days are auspicious. They are inauspicious too, if we make them so by our indiscretions." But we in this country have a devout faith in astrology. The astrologer casts our horoscopes. He calculates from the hour and day of our birth the lot that awaits us. This calculation enables him to see for himself how and when particulr acts of our life should be performed to be fraught with results. Whether he is right or wrong I am not in a position to say. When the marriage party arrived the ladies rushed to the balcony to have a view of the groom, and as ill-luck would have it my mother got a push, so that she fell out of the window over the live wires of electricity and died instanteously.

The ceremony had to be proceeded with, I don't know why. They should have postponed it in view of the fact that my mothter's dead body still lay in the house, and in view of the fact that my father who was a paralytic was stuned by the shock. and had not yet recovered consciousness. The ceremony lasted for well over three hours, and when it ended life slowly flickered out of the body of my father, so that by the time I was wedded, I was also orphaned. My aunt was overwhelmed with grief, partly at having to part with me, and chiefly, perhaps owing to the double tragedy in the house. She had a weak heart. The palpitation became more acute, and her neurosis, an old malady, developed

in alarming proportions. I went to her house three days after my wedding and when I returned, I was afraid she was a wreck of her old self. A few days later I received a telegram to say that aunt too had passed away.

Little remains to be said of this side of my life, for after the death of my aunt the property passed on to her husband's collaterals whose relations with my aunt having been strained in her husband's lifetime, I had no ties left between me and the family. So I was now wholly and solely a hanger-on of my husband's people.

After the preliminary functions which a rich marriage entails, and which cover a few months' programme, I had an opportunity of settling down to a peaceful existence with my husband at Allahabad. He was extremely handsome. He must have been as lovely as a maid, when be was a boy, and even now when he was grown up, he was extremely lovable. Every girl in the neighbourhood was weak about him. He was a paragon indeed. And I was not a bit jealous. I was rather proud that he was mine. I loved him so. He was solicitous of my comfort in every detail, and even went so far as to quarrel with his mother when she spoke at all harshly to me, or dared to contradict me, even when I was in the wrong, which I often was. He was coddling me as it were, making me a pampered spoilt girl We were made to share the same bedroom. I had learnt from Mrs. Turner that the rise in the sexual urge controlled by the monthly period is as a rule utilized by a sensible husband for sexual congress. There was many a rise and fall in that, but it was the same to my husband. He seemed to be afraid of hurting me and I was too shy to throw a hint that it was a much longed-for pleasure, a culminating joy, in so far as it would satisfy my inordinate passion for the motherhood. My flesh was aching for the warmth of a baby in arms, the very image of his father, the same delicate features, the same graceful form. I knew it would be he, for I bore. his impression on my heart, as he was my idol. But he

was cold, cold as marble, although I could detect not only sparks but also blasing flares of love in him When I was hot with exciement, I sometimes kissed him of my own accord, and even embraced him, but it was of no avail. It seems that my heart wasn't contagious, for he did not warm up to it. I cast aside my bashfulness one day to the extent of clenching my fists, and biting him, but he was cool as a cucumber, and when he noticed how it hurt me to be deprived of the one thing in life that a married woman expects from a husband, he burst into tears and cried as if his heart would break. This killed my ardour and I tried to console him. He shed scalding tears of remorse, and when this fit of emotion had passed, his heart seemed to be lightened, and he said he had made up his mind to take me into his confidence, but he was afraid the shock would break my heart. His love for me was too great for words.

I told him I returned his love with equal fervour, but I was shocked to feel that I did not share his confidence. A wife whose husband kept his secrets from her was accursed. It broke my heart to think he did not regard me as worthy of his love, as fit to share his secrets.

This was more than he could stand. He was carried away by a fit of emotion, and said he would not rest till he had expiated the sin and paid whatever penalty I imposed. He was my slave for life. I bade him make a clean breast of it all, and be sure I would be his, whatever the sin. He related to me the story of his life which I shall reproduce in his own words

"Handsomeness in boys is a rare gift, and as such is looked upon by some as a blessing. Far from being a blessing, it is a divine curse, a punishment meted out on us mortals by the Powers that be, as it were for the sins of a previous incarnation.

"Beauty of form and features is something that is intended for the fair sex. If it is the share of the sterner sex, it puts them out of tune with their immediate surroundings. A woman can hide her looks behind a

veil, can stay behind the four walls of her house to protect herself from the glare of publicity, from the shamefulness of public gaze. Not so a boy. He may be stared at with impunity, his beauty devoured by every wayside scoundrel, and if it excites him to sexuality, the boy must bear the consequences. The law protects the boy of course, but so does the law protect the child whose silly good for-nothing parents load him with gold and jewels. And yet so many such children are kidnapped, and done to death. They excite the cupidity of the scoundrels, and the law cannot save their lives. It may hang the rogues, but what good does it to the poor innocent children thus cut off. And they may be saved this fate, if the parents take it into their heads that their children are worth savings, that the ornaments far from providing an embelishment (and perhaps also a show of their wealth are worse than plague or cholera germs, and can carry away their lovely little children even faster than these pests. They may be saved this fate if the parents make up their minds to save them. And how about the pretty boy? Can his parents save him from seduction by bringing him up as a girl? Not a bit of it. He must face the world, equipped like a hero, and not decked like a bride. A stay-at home, much too delicate child might turn out to be a good carpet knight, but in the thick of the battle of life he is bound to be a hopeless failure. This comes of being gifted with looks. They make one much too delicate, and hence unfit for the job of a HE MAN.

"I had looks. My parents fondled me because of them. My class-mates lionised me on their account. My teachers favoured me on that score. It was a sense of superiority that they impressed me with. I was superior to the rest of them, otherwise why was I so favoured? My class-mates were friendly. This friendliness manifested itself in more ways than one. They offered me gifts of picture-books and toys. They brought me nice things to eat. They offered me free tickets to the pictures. They formed themselves into

parties and took me out to various places of amusement, where we had great fun and feasting. They even went so far as to offer me costly presents such as silken kerchiefs, ties and shoe-laces, one gave me a wrist-watch My people at home saw all these things and admired them, but they never questioned my source of getting them. One of the boys who was very profuse in his gifts was much older than I. He would give me something or another each day ; but one day he invited me to his house. He promised to give me a treat. I went and this was the beginning of my end. I was an ignorant youth. I did not know I was being pushed into the abysmal depths of the infernal regions. I was being lured to my doom by sundry presents which it was my parents' first duty to check, but which they did not stop me from accepting, as I was a spoilt child pampered and fondled initially by themselves.

"When under the influence of a scoundrel you begin to sink morally you cause yourself unnecessary excitement. A sort of irritation sets in which promotes in you the highly pernicious habits of self abuse. This was how I fared. I began to lose recklessly. My face began to grow pinched. My cheeks became hollow. There were rings round my eyes, and these affected my looks seriously. And looks being my weak point I made up my mind to go neat, and get over the evil habit with an iron will.

'But this evil practice leaves no will to speak of. After each loss you take a pledge never to repeat the act, but each time you come across a pretty face of one of your tormentors, you are excited beyond your power of control, with the result that you forget your pledge, and after a copious discharge you are again filled with bitter remorse. At times I did abstain from self-abuse for a time, and would not touch my genital for days, but then a sort of irritation started of itself, and when I had a look at it, I found a white pasty substance at the pit of the gland. The smell of this substance caused high sexual excitement, and a sort of itch, which caused

the practice to start anew. I had temporarily relief from tension if I did it, but I felt in my heart of hearts after each act that I had driven another nail into my coffin. I began to wash the genital and keep it quite clean each morning and evening, washing it with soap and tepid water. But then there was irritation caused in another center of sexual pleasure, I mean the *anus*. This too promoted self-abuse. I was a victim of chronic constipation. I had a fondness for condiments. I had a fondness for drink, fish, eggs, tea, coffee. I used to visit cinemas, and revelled in smutty talk and amorous scenes, and through the instrumentality of a scoundrel beeame a dope-addict. The result of all this stimulation was that my losses became more and more excessive, and my evil habits more and more confirmed. I began to act a scoundrel myself. For six years I practised these with a vengeance, so that this prolonged and extravagent abuse of my organs resulted in the congestion of my genital and premature ejaculation. It caused a havoc in my system. My eyes became sunken, and cheek ho low. I had a splittlng headache at times, and a continuous backache. I was afflicted with dizziness and loss of memory, palpitation of the heart and a general breakdown of the nervous system. When due to excessive drainage the organ refused to function, I tried almost every medicine advertised but nothing availed. To my sexual life, this was the end of things."

The Doctor had patiently listened to my husband's tale of woe, and remarked :

"Your husband's case was pitiable indeed. But you will be astonished to hear that such a lot of our so-called religious celibates to preserve their continence have recourse to this pernicous practice of self-abuse, to such extent that it becomes a habit. The result is that there is an irritation in the prostate urethra which causes a corresponding irritation in the brain which excites them to increased sexual desire. You must have noticed that some of the so-called *Brahmcharies* are morose, ill-natured, bashful, exceeding-

ly self-conscious, recluses given to self-communion, capable of little attention to anything outside their vicious thoughts. They are afflicted with pain in the muscles, the eyes, the head, and are dizzy and constipated. They are physical cowards, will stand all sorts of insult, will run away rather than fight or stick up for their most obvious rights. The spirit of manhood seems to be crushed out of them. They are often praised for their saintliness, humility, nobility of character, piety and spiritualistic bias. Their goodness, however, is not due to any virtue. They are good because they are much too cowardly to be violent or bad. If you come acrsss one of the type, you know what to think of him. He has been slowly sinking so low as to have lost all self-cotrol. Even if he tries to break himself of the habit it won't be any use. He is doomed to perpetual suffering unless he goes to a doctor and gets his prostate first gently massaged and then injected with a weak solution of silver nitrate, s ıy I : 3000. This will cure him like anything and from a morose, und‹rfed, ill-natured man he will be easily transformed intc a jolly good-natured fellow full of the spirit of life.

"But it isn't cure so much as prevention that eounts for much. For a clean tomorrow live a clean to-day. Learn the truth about sex and keep it impressively before your mind's eye. Do not over load your stomach. Do not stuff: do not fret. Do not toss about in bed. If you do not feel like sleeping get out of bed at once. Do not eat rich pastry. Take a deep breathing exercise before retiring. Self-pollution arises from sex ignorance: and sex ignorance is due to prudery. It is daily corrupting the souls and bodies of thousands. It is destroying some of the very flower of our youth. Remember that the glands which secrete the sexual fluid borrow it from the blood. If there is not a demand upon this fluid, they pour it back into the blood, making the body hale and strong, Be the master and not the slave of your passions. Do not overtax your

energy by being foolhardy. Remember if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing at once.

"Your suggestions might have come in handy, if my husband had lived to follow them up. But the poor fellow died a miserable death."

"One might have expected it. Was it slow and lingering?"

"It was very sudden. He visited an advertising medical quack"

"He did, did he? Well she should have known better than to go to a quack, These fakirs who advertise that lost manhood can be regained have never recovered their own lost manhood. What come of his visit?"

"It ended in the death of my husband. He gave some specific which had in it oxide of mercury which he had prepared himself. It turned out to be poisonous and it brought on some complication which ended in my husband's death.

"During my husband's illness I served him like a most devoted wife, as well I might. He was all I had in the world, and I would have spilled my life blood, if I could save him, but I couldn't

"I loved him for his own dear sake. He had the face of an angel. How I wished he had an image of such angelic beauty behind. And now it has dissolved into space. Maybe, as nothing is ever lost in Nature, his beauty too has been reproduced. It may have its prototype in human form somewhere, and may be represented in all ages. He might hit upon the same form in any one of his myraids of incarnations. My love might attract him to me hereafter. Who can tell?

## CHAPTER X

### Society Sinners

Grief is said to have a chastening effect on one's soul, and on a sexual feelings if rightly subdued and said to be gradually sublimated. My physical charm

was greatly enhanced, by the sublimation. In the course of my sexual rhythmic tide the edge of my passions gradually became blunter and blunter, till it was absolutely under control.

It depends so much on a person's diet. Simple living is the principle; high thinking follows as a matter of course. And these two set you on the path of virtue. But it is not safe to bank on continence. The more you seek to suppress passions the higher will they rebound, for the factors which cause excitement being there, the glands will be so much the readier for secretions, which will flood out at the slightest provocation, of a stimulant that you really cannot resist. My brother-in-law Hem Raj who was a married man looked out to me for a diversion. This deversion at first took the shape of an innocent evening entertainment. His wife was away at her parents. On his birthday he stood me a treat. He sent for all sorts of nice tinned dishes, and a bottle of whisky and soda and fried fish and sausages and neat dishes, which smelt so savoury I had a strong desire. I should taste them. But he was avowedly a vegetarian. When I asked him what he had brought for me, he said they were all for me, and they were certain varieties of vegetables which had been imported from countries such as Sweden, Egypt, Bulgaria, Italy and so forth. He looked so serious that although I suspected that he w s joking. I was half inclined to believe him. He poured out some whisky and soda and bade me quaff it off, as it was a very refreshing drink that would send a thrill of joy through my frame.

"Is it wine?" I asked.

"It is nothing of the kind," he said. "It is the juice of some fruits. It tones the nerves." I hesitated. He drank two siphons "You know," said he. "I never touch wine." He never did. I felt reassured. It could not be w ine. I sipped it at first. It tasted queer. He bade me on oath to

drink it off at a gulp, as it was the most bracing tonic ever invented. It was the most exhilarating drink in the world, and it wasn't wine."

I drank it off and felt I had a sort of dizziness and my chest and throat and eyes began to burn. He gave me another siphon thoroughly cooled. "This will give you a cooling sensation," said he.

I quaffed it off. Then I felt terribly hungry and helped myself to those most delicious dishes They were so appetising, so palatable, I did full justice to them. They caused not only dizziness but also a sort of nausea. I told him so. He said it was due to the dishes being foreign to my palate They were, however extremely nourishing. He advised me to take a tiphon or two of soda but I refused to have any more of it. I felt sleepy ; so he left me.

He often sent dishes like that to my room. I must confess I enjoyed them. But these, I long after came to know, and conjectured even then, were meat dishes. I felt highly stimulated. My pent-up emotions began to find expression. My sleeping sexual passions were awakened. On the Diwali night he begged me to join him in making a day of it. I reluctantly agreed. The drinks must have been too strong, I lost consciousness, and dreamt that I was being backed and hewed. It was a nightmare experience. When I awoke I found I had been let down.

Soon after his wife returned. The servants must have spoken to her about his relations with me She looked at me as a butcher looks on a goat. She dare not offend me openly, for even though now I was a widow, and my spirits were sought to be depressed. I still inspired the household with awe. Thanks to my late husband's influence I was once the queen of the household. But now I was a queen dowager. And another woman aspired to the dignity that once was mine. She felt that so long as I was in the house she could not persuade the household to do her the honours that were her due.

And now that her jealousy was thoroughly worked up, now that she felt she was being deprived of her husband's loving care by another's wiles, she became very desparate.

I don't know how she planned it, but she somehow succeeded in persuading the rascally son of our old sweeper who was a grown-up youth to pose as my secret lover, and bluff that his love was returned. Of course, nobody believed him. Still he persisted in his wild tale of how he had so often met me on the sly in the privacy of my bedroom and how I was timed to meet him again late that night. He called at the hour, and knocked. The whole household seemed to have conspired against me, for most of them were awake; but rather than notify his visit to me as I lay asleep, they merely watched the fun. He knocked with unconcern as if he were the master of the house. I was a heavy sleeper. He repeated the knock. I asked who it was. There was no response. I thought it must be my mother in-law who was deaf, so I opened. He rushed in and in full view of the menials and everybody, he took me into a tight grisly embrace, and dragged me in, in spite of my screams. I fought like an infuriated tigress, and used my nails to hurt his face. My screams brought my brother-in-law. He gave the scoundrel the hiding he deserved and kicked him down the stairs so that he bled in the mouth and his shins were badly bruised. The scoundrel raised such an outcry as to collect a crowd. He declared that I was in love with him, that I had permitted him the union half a dozen times, that we had been surprised in the act by Hem Raj and he had mishandled him.

The scandal spread like wild fire, and before the next day was out. Hem Raj was sent for by the *Panchayat* and in my absence without my side of the case being heard. I was declared to be a fast woman, and Hem Raj and the rest of the family

were enjoined to cast me out. The family was to go to Hardwar and treat a hundred Brahmins to a feast, and expiate their sins of pollution by acts of charity, and Tuesday fasts, and bathing in the Ganges, and doing all the places of pilgrimage. So I was ostracized and expelled, and at once asked to take train. My ornaments and things were packed by the sweeper-woman, and I was given a purse by Hem Raj and a hired tonga took me to the station, where I entrained for Cawnpore.

I reached my sister's place, and related to her the tale of my woeful experience. She was glad to have me in her home, of course with her husband's consent.

Misfortunes never come singly. My sister being in the family way, would not let her husband come near her, and he happened to be over-sexed. It must have been in a fit of craziness, he assaulted me in my room one night. I screamed, of course, and my sister rushed to my aid, and seeing her husband there furiously asked :

"What did you come in here for?"

He behaved like a cad. He said he had come to appeal to my better nature to leave them alone. My notoriety as an outcaste had reached the Cawnpore folk too, and they themselves were in fear of being ostracized.

There was no course open to me but to depart and leaving my sister in tears, I took the first train to Hardwar.

My sister flew into a passion. She was not so cross with her husband whom she could ill afford to offend, as she w s with me as well as with the gods. Why was I widowed if I happened to have had looks? As if I could help them! And why couldn't I hold myself in if I was a widow? This was the last straw.

I packed my things and sneaked out of their home

to try a widows' *ashram* attached to the *mutt* of my family *guru* at Hardwar.

Vigneshwra Dass, the great *guru*, was very glad to receive me into his holy presence in the inner sanctuary where he performed diverse acts of penance to disperse the phantoms of *Maya* or illusions. Since my husband was a great favourite of the *gurus*, the *guru* had been a frequent visitor at our place. He was a very holy man. When he started on his daily exercises subjecting himself to unspeakable torture I questioned him as to their significance. He bade me follow suit I could not stand it, and told him I did not like that sort of thing. It did not seem to be any use. He noticed my scepticism and explained it all as follows :

The inner self is the soul. That is what we call personality. It is a mere drop of the boundless ocean of purity and love we call God. The soul is confined in the body, and thanks to physical life around us our souls are seduced and led astray. They cannot break through the trammels of personal passions. These hold our souls enthrilled. If we make our physical life a torture, our souls will seek emancipation from the body and join the great ocean of life again, which is their haven of peace.

The mission of life is to seek such emancipation, so that the soul should be reunited for ever to the Supreme Divinity called *Parbrahm*. In that state it cries. '*Aham* *Brahama* !' which means I am the Supreme Being. The *guru* was a holy man ; but his disciples still wallowed in the mire of vice, slaves to their own passions

In the inner sanctuary were a number of widows, some of them virgins, who were isolated from the youthful male disciples and shut in behind the high walls of an enclosure. They weren't safe, however, from the depradations of the youths, who somehow managed to carry on affairs with some of them. One of the priests began to show great partiality to

me. I loathed the fellow and was indiscreet enough to report the matter to the *guru* who was so offended I had to leave the *mutt* and proceed to Lahore.

## CHAPTER XI

### The Scoundrel Abroad

Mrs. Turner used to say: "The scoundrel's abroad. No pretty lady can board a bus or a train, or walk the streets to do a bit of shopping or anything without being rudely stared at and even molested. One hears of so many cases of kidnapping, and assault. One sometimes suspects this country is not safe for a pretty girl to travel in all by herself. The rogues go dressed as maidens in a thick veil. They hire touts to entice pretty girls. They even use force. Hence if yon have to travel, always sit by your man's side. And if ever you have to go without him in a ladies compartment, always go in a second class and with a chaperon. There you do not meet the class of ruffian who believes in violence."

"What sensible talks I had from Mrs. Turner. I wished she were there by my side. Now was the time I needed her valuable advice the most. But she had gone home to Cumberland, Her late husband's insurance money awaited her. She was now pretty well off. Would she acknowledge my letter, if I wrote? She certainly would. But I was the last person to accept anything by way of charity from anybody. I was ashamed to beg. And yet I could not afford to carry on like that much longer. I was at the end of the tether I must find some way out of it. Miss Mohini could help fix me at Lahore. I might get a job as a music instructress. Would I be able to keep my honour safe under her wings? She would vouch for my honour, certainly. A good decent living for a little labour every day. And music was my hobby, both Indian and English. vocal and instrumental. I must go to Mohini. I had

a few hundred rupees. The money would keep me for a month till my wages would be due.

"Even while Mohini was at Delhi. Mrs. Turner had written to inform Champa that I had taken a violent fancy to her. She had described her in her letter as a fast woman, as one who would certainly be a very undesirable companion for me. Champa had written a very strong letter threatening to report to my aunt, if I persisted in keeping in touch with Mohini. I had shown Champa's letter to Mohini. Mohini had owned that she was madly in love with me. And to be quite candid, I too returned her love. She said she would die if she were deprived of my love. I too then felt I would miss her terribly. She had taken me in her arms and kissed me most passionately. I had let her. It pleased me so to resign myself to her. I had a thrilling, tingling sensation when our lips met, when my quivering form was folded to her breast.

"Promise me you will never never desert me," she had vehemently urged.

I had given her the promise.

When I spoke of my feelings towards Mohini to Mrs. Turner, she said it was unnatural love, and did not deserve to be encouraged.

"Why, what is the trouble with it?" I asked, that is much too comprehensive to leave my room for anything else in the mind. If you love one of your own sex with all the earnestness which you are capable of you certainly cannot love one of the opposite sex enough to discharge your wifely duties to him. It is the opposites that Nature intends to unite, for instance, positive and negative electricity. Two of the same sex are intended to repel each other and not attract. That is against the canons of both natural as well as religious laws."

"But," I argued, "you cannot help your sentiment any more than you can help blinking or the beating of our heart."

"It is not so bad as that," said she. "You blink and your heart beats because of certain instincts. You love a fellow guided or misguided by your passions. Good people learn to control their instincts, And you refuse to subdue even your passions. You are much too passionate, my child."

"But why love one of the opposite sex? What sense is there in that?"

"Natural love,' she replied, "is Nature's way to propagate the race, without which this creation of God would cease to exist."

"Don't talk in riddles," I remonstrated. "Why. God's creation should certainly be independent of man's instrumentality."

"God's creation isn't haphazard. It is based on sound scientific principles. The female is gifted with generative organs and glands. One such gland releases eggs. These eggs come down a canal and either bursting flow out or they are arrested by the male cell, if it happens to be about. Nature intends that the male cell and the female egg cell should unite."

"How do you know what Nature does or does not intend?" I broke in. She ignored my question and went on.

"When the male cell and the female egg cell unite, Nature swells the womb, so that it is not only very appreciably enlarged, but also becomes soft and padded, so that the new creature formed by the union of the male cell and the female egg cell should find a soft and padded nest for itself. Now suppose instead of a male cell that man's love of you provides, you had another female egg cell, you would have no swelling of the womb, no new creature formed and no propagation of the human race at all Would not you be thus defeating the very ends for which Nature bestowed these organs on us and on men. Think, my good girl, what love of a fast woman such as Mohini would lead you to."

"Leave alone," said I, "the propagation of the

human race, which I alone do not hold a brief, and explain to me if you are really serious, what harm one woman loving another would do to Nature ?"

"Such love as yours is called homo-sexual love We used to hear of pretty girls tempting a saint. We called them temptresses. This is the age of pretty boys. Not handsome, mark you but pretty. They do their toilet using face powder and cream and hydrogen peroxide to give their hair a touch of gold, and dress themselves even more elaborately than their pretty sisters. And when they burst forth into the public like the moon bursting forth from behind the clouds, is it to be wondered at they tempt the bachelors who being unable to woo and win over a bride use them as their tools. The same applies to ladies but not so much in your country as in America. These are called fairies. So my good Leela, if you are carried away by homo-sexual love you will also be called in the terminology of the West, a fairy."

Mrs. Turner was an angel. How I missed her then. Would my going out to Mohini be interpreted as homo-sexual love? But my feelings for her had cooled down a bit. I wouldn't resign myselft to her now even for a passionate kiss. It would cause me no thrill, anyway. If she attempted to be too free now, I might resent it. She would certainly not find in me a passive tool.

"Excuse me," began the Doctor. "It is more easily said than done. Homo-sexality like self-abuse is a Malady. The sufferer seeks to cure it by an act of will. His will-power having already been undermined by the self same malady, he finds himself more and more entrangled in the meshes of the fell disease. Seduction of boys having grown, the question of homo-sexuality is the rage.

The Doctor opined that if boys were made to dress in simple rough khadi, if they were provided with a thorough knowledge of sex so that they did not have to make a secret of their illicit connections from their presents, if they were kept clean in body and mind, if

they were given a lot of physical exercise, if they were kept wholesomely employed in healthy pastimes in their leisure hours, if their diet was regulated and sour things and condiments, cinemas and theatres were banned, if the teachers in schools were more responsible, better paid men, the evil of sodomy would disappear for good. He said it wasn't right on my part to be homo-sexual.

"No, Doctor, you haven't heard me out. I was never a homo-sexual and my will-power is so strong it would never bend and never break. If I ever changed I did so only when I was thoroughly convinced, I was not in the right. You see I wasn't obstinate. My only weakness was my beauty. My chastity was unquestionable. If Hem Raj ought to seduce me, it was in a fit of unconsciousness. If Chandu Lal was knocked silly by my glamorous looks, and in spite of his avowed fidelity to my sister sought to seduce me, it was no fault of mine. If in spite of his unwelcome attentions I had persisted in staying on at my sister's house, I would certainly have been to blame. But I hadn't anywhere to go to unless it was to Lahore. Mohini was my last resource. So I had taken the Howrah Mail bound for Lahore.

"Mohini's house was not a brothel. I would not have minded if it were, for it is my firm conviction that if a person has a will of iron she need not worry about her environments. The world shapes itself to her mould."

I had that will, as you will see for yourself. She lived in a very respectable quarter of the city, in a very respectable house and was looked upon as a very respectable woman. But far from being respectable she was carrying on a very flourshing practice as a highly placed prostitute. You will wonder how she managed to play two roles and be at the top in both. She was a great fraud. Nature had given her a face and figure, and the innocent simplicity of a child. These she carried about as a garb of purity and respectability. And by a touch of cosmetics and beauty paraphernalia, she gave

herself a pointed nose, a dimpled chin and was transformed into a raging beauty of the glamorous type. This gave her gold and a high position as a woman of sin'

This duplicity of character for which we are only too apt to condemn Mohini is a common trait of the character of ninety per cent of our so-called respectable people. The priest whose public life none dare question, the pleader, the doctor, the banker, the zemindar whose public character is considered above reproach have most of them in their private life a skeleton in the cupboard. Mohini as a prostitute had her home in the Tibi Bazar. You could see her there from six to eleven in the evening. As these hours she had given out, she visited her lady friends. The make up was effected in a cab. She stepped out of it in disguise under a veil and always near a friend's house in the Sathan Bazar, from where the cab picked her up at eleven. Prostitutes usually retire late, but Mohini was so popular, her wishes were respected by her admirers, so that they let her alone after eleven. None dare molest her after that. She refused to be associated with every Jack. Sam and Harry Every new-comer must have his blood tested and passed as free from poison before he was allowed the privilege of approaching her. And when he did have accesses to her at last he must offer her a handsome fee for every favour granted. A klss was a favour, every single item, however simple such as patting her on the cheek was a favour for which payment had to be made on the spot. And actual cohabitation, why it was a treat which only those could enjoy who had money in heaps and could spare it in heaps.

Mohini was Mohini at home, an embodiment of respeetability, a musician but not a harlot, and Mehtab during business hours, a vision of loveliness, a queen among harlots She never met any gentleman in her public life. She never any lady in her private life. So even though she led a life of sinfulness, she passed for a respectable musician. I was her guest, for a few days and all the time she kept on holding out to me a promise

of getting me fixed up as a teacher. But her promise although daily renewed showed never a sign of materialising. She was very good to me, so very solicitous of my personal comfort. She made me feel very much at home by her kindness. I really felt ashamed for myself living on her means, and not turning my hand to anything. She showed in a hundred and one ways that she was desperately in love with me. When I reminded her I was being a useless strain on her resources, she hugged me and kissing me profusely, told me I was nearest and dearest to her heart. She pointed out that I was a novice in the art. She would first train me up as a musician, and subsequently start me as principal of a music school on a handsome salary.

My training was started the very next morning. A very old music master who could play on all sorts of instruments including the *tabla* started my training. His name was *Ustad* Maula Dad. He was with me from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. during the time Mohini was away. I noticed that after he had given me half-an-hour's practice he stopped for a bit. He said he should let it sink into my soul. During these intervals he talked, and his talk was so interesting, it would be worth while reproducing it for your amusement.

"Do you like music ?"

"Of course I do, otherwise why all this trouble

"You call it trouble ?

"I mean why this labour."

"What makes you like it ?"

"What makes other people like it ?"

" Some like it for its harmony. It brings them peace. It lends grace to their movements as you might have noticed in case of dancing girls. Others pick it up as a profession."

"I too want to pick it up for that."

"You mean th you have a professional interest in music ?"

"Yes."

" You mean you want to be a prostitute ?"

I was wild with indigation.

"Have you no daughter of your own to turn into a prostitute ?" was my question.

'Don't flare up child. I am old enough to be your grandfather, ain't I ? I put this question only in a matter-of-fact way. If you are offended I am prepared to swallow my remarks. But let me tell you, a prostitute is not so black as she is painted. What are *dev dasies* if not prostitutes ? And yet they are associated with the holiest of holy places. If you go back to prehistoric times you will find among the earliest form of civilization the mention of a certain goddess under different names. Some called her Apheodise, others gave her the name of Melita and yet others called her Yude. Every blessed man and woman of the world worshipped at the holy shrine of the goddess. Men dedicated their wealth and women their beauty and charm to the service of this goddess.

"The institution of marriage existed, but one day in the year was set apart in honour of this goddess, when a holy fair was held at the shrine, where ladies, pretty or plain, beautifully dressed, with their heads adorned with wreaths and ribbons sat in rows. Men from all over the country promenaded up and down before them, and each made his choice from among them, and throwing a coin in her lap would draw his choice into a cypress grove, both shouting. "Blessed is Melita." The coin was dropped in the temple box as an offering.

"In Corinth they had a huge temple which was so large it formed a city by itself. Twelve hundred priestesses who were the prettiest in the country offered themselves for prostitution. They asked nothing for themselves. The lovers presented rich gifts, but these went to the temple. With religious sanction not women who were rather pretty but unfortunately could not find a suitable husband utilised their money value, offering only a part of their fee at the shrine of the

goddess. Later, when people became less and less godly, prostitution remained, but compulsory offering at the holy shrines ceased.

"The prostitute is the immoral guardian of public morality. She fulfils a social mission. She is the guardian of virginal modesty, the guardian of matrons who fear late maternity. She is the most efficient guardian of virtue. She was always given a pl ce of honour at games. Socrates visited the place of a prostitute. Therodeta was the name of the prostitute. Socrates visited her with his disciples. He carried on a cheerful and unembarrassed conversation with her. He paid a graceful compliment to her beauty. The Roman Emperor Caligula had court prostitutes who were highly honoured and replenished the State coffers by hiring their person out to rich folk. In the Deccan prostitutes are made to lead out processions on most festive occasions. They hold them in very high esteem.

"In Babylonia they used to have a deputy of the god. This deputy was in charge of the god's temple. The temple had a high tower, on the top of which was built a chamber which was designed for the celestial bride. A couch was provided in this chamber for the use of the bride. Any rich woman who could not otherwise beget a son was allowed by her husband to be a celestial bride for the night. This was done to provide an heir for his estate, which would otherwise go a begging. The celestial bridgeroom for the night was the god in the person of his deputy."

"You mean to suggest that prostitution is a religious institution?" I asked.

"You may call it what you will, but you cannot deny that it had its origin with some one of the gods. Man and woman were made after his heart. His idea was that they should flourish, that they should procreate. The woman was too shy to yield her person to the man. He wooed her in vain.

"Then he used threats and even force to hurt her, but obstinate as she was, she was still adamant. He

appealed to the gods. One of them promised to set the pace. He approached the woman, offered to adorn her with a nosegay of flowers. What a delightful look it gave her! And its perfume, how very exciting! What a sexual urge it gave her! She was half-willing, but then there was her modesty. She could not be persuaded to yield her person. But he was a god, and his resources were limitless. So he brought her a beautiful ornament, so beantiful that it could not fail to tempt her. He struck a bargain. Let her yield and the ornament would be hers.

"This was the origin of prostitution.

"Now then, if you come to think of it, what is a wife but a prostitute. She bargains with a male called her husband to offer her a home, and in return yields her person to him. He is continuously courting her favour and seeking to please her. To what end? For his sexual gratification. She yields her person for no such end. Her part of the bargain may have in view a remote craving for maternity, but she does not think the labour worth the prize."

"So you think even a chaste housewife is a prostitute."

"I think I have been able to prove what she virtually is in spite of her professions. A prostitute is accused, because religion has made her so. It came into some busy-body's head that if prostitutes had a free licence, married women would't have much of a chance, So by way of propaganda the prostitutes were held to be accused."

"Apart from other considerations, don't you think it is degrading to make oneself so cheap as to sell one's honour which is invaluable, for money?" I objected.

"You are under the misconception that prostitutes make themselves to cheap, that they yield their person for the asking or at least to such as are prepared to pay the price, however high. You may undeceive your-

self. No prostitute will sgree to the act with alacrity. You have to woo her for days before you win her, and you keep paying her court all the time. Of course, her demands are high. She fleeces her patrons. But that is part of the game. They go to her to be fleeced. It's not a poor man's or skintlint's job. She is so much in demand, not by bachelors or widowers, alone. Those who have pretty wives at home also go to her."

"But why?" I asked petulantly.

"Because she has made sexual gratification of the males a fine art. The wife lacks knowledge of sex. She lacks the necessary blandishments that make the sex act all the more enjoyable to the male. True, the prostitute doesn't enjoy repetition of the act. None ever does. But she khows how to make others enjoy it. It is a great sacrifice on her part, and they pay her for it, handsomely in some cases, poorly in others.

"Has the prostitute no heart? Doesn't she love her patrons as the wife loves her husband?"

"Well, it all depends. She stimulates love to all, but she it too astute to give her heart entirely away to every chance visitor. A fine trade she would make of it if she did! Now and again she does fall in love with one after her heart. Then it is either a romance or a tragedy; romance if he returns her love and is available in the marriage market, and tragedy if she has to carry on in spite of her cravings for romantic love, and fidelity to her knight."

"Where do they get their fresh recruitment of prostitutes?"

"From a number of sources. In the first place a pretty widow who happened to be a virgin finds widow's weeds, consisting of a soild sheet, in some cases a close cropped pate and the duties of a drudge who in spite of her drudgery is looked upon by her people asaslimy grimy writhing worm, rather uncongenial. The life and jollity of the *chakla* or *randi bazaar* is Heaven in

contrast. The great world moves there attracted by the glare. So she makes a change.

"Then the gipsies who kidnap girls even as babies make a liberal contribution towards swelling the ranks of the prostitutes. The discarded wives finding no redress are a third source. There are some who have lost face by being kidnapped and have been discarded by society. They are easily accommodated. Some whose moral sensibilities have been dulled by religious sanction join the ranks. The so-called *murlis* are a case in point."

"Isn't it a pity so much beauty is allowed to go to the dogs for one thing or another? Why hould law allowof an innocent girl giving the day spring of her life to make a loafer's holiday?"

"The prostitute isn't out merely for seduction. There is an inner circle among them who by their marvellous beauty and fascination hold the nobility and gentry of the country under their spell, acting as spies and yet receiving from their patrons by way of support jewellery and clothes worth a king's ransom. Someone of these prostitutes is a beauty queen of the circle. She has a few charming associates, musicians of the highest order. They assemble of an evening to entertain an assembly of rich folk. A dozen revellers sit around the queen in a big ball pulling at their favourite hookahs. A dancing girl shows her performance in accompaniment to instrumental music. Her vocal music is simply ravishing. She is being tipped liberally. The queen knows how best to entertain her guests. This one will have a dash of musk in rose-water. That one will have brandy and soda. A third will need to have rich tea. All are duly supplied. The betels are passed round. There is the gossip of the town. Sherbets circulate. The nautch is a treat. Everyone is delighted The girl claps her hands. The performance is over."

*Ustad* Maula Dad seemed to be very well informed.

He gave me a number of such interesting discourses over a couple of months. He spoke in such glowing terms of the sacrifices and usefulness of prostitutes, calling them the safety valve that keeps society intact, saves feminine virtue, and protects us from a terrible explosion that my active antipathy against the prostitutes dulled down, and a wave of sympathy for the poor creatures swept over my mind. His lessons and the practical work he got me to do made me an adept in all sorts of music. So naturally my esteem for him grew apace, and it developed into an affection due to an incident which I am going to describe.

"Even a widow is not exempt from her monthly rhythm of sexual urge. She has her regularities and irregularities of monthly period just the same as though she were a wedded woman, with her husband alive. Only she being a widow her people do not take much notice of her, and leave her to herself to make shift on her own. She is supposed to be made to b ar and forbear. Hence her sexual ills are either concealed by her, or if being much too acute are communicated to her people, they are totally ignored, or at best treated very lightly.

"I had such a disorder, and it caused me pain that was almost unbearable. *Ustad* Maula Dad divined my trouble and before starting his lesson took out from his inner pocket a rag, at the end of which was tied a knot. He undid this knot and taking out a pinch put it on the palm of my hand and then taking out a small phial, soaked it in the liquid and bade me swallow it with cold water. It afforded instantaneous relief. He later gave me the name of the herbs of the dry root of which the powder was made and of other herbs of the juices of which the medicine was a mixure. These herbs are hard to obtain, but they afford a panacea of all feminine ills. I will show you Doctor, what these herbs are, where they grow ond how they can be used. You may

administer the medicines to all my sisters who are suffering from any sexual ills.

"Thus he won over not only my esteem but also my affection. He once told me he was very fond of me. Could I be a child to him? He had none of his own to love. I ignored this question and said. "You know so much about prostitutes."

"I know so much about such a lot of things," was his response.

"Tell me why ensible men patronise a prostitute? Why do not they go in for matrimony and settle down to married love?"

"Most do. But this is a country where boys and girls are not allowed to adjust themselves mutually before marriage. Sex harmony is therefore an exception, and not a rule. Beauty is a thing that creates love, and beauty culture is a thing that we neglect. Hence most of our women are unattractive. On top of it our women are lacking in a knowledge of sex, and cannot by artificial means excite sex impulse in their over-worried husbands.

"A prostitute, on the other hand, is an adept in the art of sexual excitement and has got the loveliest figure imaginable. Her naked body has a supernal charm which no words can describe. The sight of this charm cannot fail to tempt even is unclean. The over sexed husband can't control himself. He goes to the prostitute. And even when the ebb of the wife's vitality returns, more often than not, being unlearned she cannot show to advantage her highest point of loveliness and charm occasioned by the rhythmic process going on within her. The prostitute gives full play to the great rhythm of her being. She retreats at time, but even her sex indifference leads an edge to her patron's sexual appetite. The wife is much too docile to resist, and passively yield herself to his perpetual demands. This destroys for him the elation, the palpitating thrills and surprises of the

chase which are essential for the satisfaction of his polygamous instincts.

"Besides, in most cases the wife and the husband have a common bedroom. This makes her too cheap in his eyes. And if they have common living room too, his dream of her loveliness comes tottering down about his ears, when he sees her at her touilet. This everyday association reduces the keenness of stimulation, and the husband seeks the intensity of the consummation of the sex act at a prostitute's place.

"Again the woman often begins to neglect her person, and her charm begins to wane. The prostitute, on the other hand having made a fine art of the subject, becomes more and more lovable from day today. Hence, my good Leela. most people go to a prostitute and she has a roaring trade."

"But why don't housewives learn to cater for their husbands' needs as prostitutes do?"

"This is their own look-out. And it is well they don't for if they did the poor prostitute would go to the wall."

The Doctor grew impatient at the plausible way. *Ustad* Maula Dad argued in favour of prostitution and remarked :—

"They well deserve to go to the wall, for do you know what havoc they crea e among the youth of this unhappy land? They spread the germs of syphilis and other fell diseases among our innocent youth, and cause them to die a lingering death. They are vain. They are sex conscious. This gives them to the impetus to allure men. Their success blinds them to the danger of it and the cruelty.

"I know it only too well now, with my mature experience. But I am relating to you the story of my ignorance, when I could be easily misguided by any of *Ustad* Maula Dad's type. Youth is blind, and with ignorance of sex knowledge, which is

banned by prudery and false modesty, our young boys and girls fall an easy prey to the machinations of scoundrels, who to serve their own ends can easily entice innocent sex-ignorant people such as I. The remedy lies in breaking this conspiracy of silence on sexual matters"

"How did Maula Dad succeed in leading you astray?"

"He had won my esteem by his great ability. He won my affection too by his paternal regard of my best interests, and also by sundry gifts. He talked glibly of sex union between man and woman. I fought shy at first of all manner of smutty talk, but by and by it became a familiar topic. It did not give me the creeps, anyway. Sexual congress became a subject which I began to relish. He even went so far as to mention that in the beginning man and woman were one. They were divided by the wrath of the gods, and never tend to unite again. Such talk should have been revolting. It was revolting at first. I mentioned it to Mohini.

"She said the *Ustad* had a free licence. He knew what was best for us. I began to like it as a matter of course, as something that wasn't or shouldn't be banned. We became so free with each other, he even began to touch me. Strangely enough, this stimulated sexual impulse. He introduced scents to me and our songs took a romantic turn. I was thus in a fair mood for sexual stimulation, undeterred by any spiritual influences to direct the course of my life to healthier channels, when something happened to break the monotony of my existence.

"Mohini was ill of a light attack of malaria, which ended in double pneumonia, so that the Doctor shook his head and said it was a serious case. I came to her bedside. She hugged me close and then her heart was full. She only said 'I leave you to the care of *Ustad* Maula Dad."

"She became worse, and her breath became laboured. Then she had a terrible torturing pain in her chest, as if her lungs had burst, and in agony almost too deep for words, her body writhing and wriggling, life passed out of her. It must have been a nightamare experience. It depicted on her face a horrible look. What that horror was about, I cannot tell. Maybe the Angel of Death laid out before her a prospect that was terribly frightful. Maybe, too, that the Divine Judge was threatening to be extra hard on her and opened out to her the gates of hell. But *Ustad* Maula Dad told me there isn't a hell. It is all heaven across the threshold.

"My shock was great; but time heals all heart-aches. Mine was healed the sooner, because *Ustad* Maula Dad was there to amuse me with his witty remarks.

"I did feel a sort of isolation; and wondered whose guest I now was, and what I should do about myself, my hostess being dead. I wondered whose property it all was, when he would turn up and what he would do to me. I wondered too who was going to pay *Ustad's* wages. I asked him the next day what was going to happen to us."

"Why worry, my child? God who made us provided us, when we were born, with milk in the mother's breast. When he gave us teeth, didn't he also provide us with things to eat?"

A fatalist. But young folk of to-day have an inclination towards disbelief. They will not take an old man's word for it. They want a more tangible proof. I told him I must be told how I stood, to enable me to get myself fixed up at another place.

He looked grave for a moment, and then his countenance cleared.

"You are out and out a sceptic. I tell you, you have nothing to lose by sticking on."

"I have already lost my peace of mind," said I.

"Why don't you step into Mohini's shoes and be queen here as well as elsewhere?"

"What do you mean? Whose place is this?"

"Yours for the asking."

"It is in your gift?"

"Mohini, you know, was my daughter. She worked for me and as her wages. I fitted up this beautiful mansion and allowed her a fat bank balance."

"What was her job?"

"She gave me five hours in the evening, supervising my establishment and posing as a beauty-queen."

"That sounds fantastic. How could a fellow such as you keep her in luxury whereas you yourself.................have to go from door to door for a wage? What sort of an establishment is that you profess to own?"'

"I thought you knew Mohini was a prostitute."

"I heard something of the kind. But she was now a lady, leading an honourable life."

"Yes, for nineteen hours of the day. For five hours she was enthroned in the hearts of a circle of my patrons who could afford to pay a fortune for just one smile on her sweet lips. She had no compulsion to go in for sexual congress with any. There are other girls kept for t e purpose. She only went to give them a flash of her queenly beauty. They were prepared to go all lengths to please her. Most of them aren't able to commit the act. They merely feast their eyes on beauty, thirsting for a kiss and seeking no more than that. The queen may live chaste and pure and even

virtuous, staying miles away from prostitution. It is her stunning beauty that the establishment needs to capture a rich clientele for the three girls who are there to carry on the trade. They are pretty, of course, but not graceful enough te attract rich customers, nor have they so rich a voice as to thrill them."

"And now that Mohini's dead ?"

"We shall have to look for another girl."

"Have you such a girl in view ?" I asked.

"None, save you," he replied.

"You think I will do ?"

"More than that ; you are the girl, the only girl in the world to grace the throne even better than Mohini did. You will live like a very very well-to-do widow, and in a make-up which I shall provide in another house you will pose as our beauty-queen. No one will know you in the establishment as the rich widow of Anarkali, and none of your lady friends and dependants here will associate your name with the beauty-queen of the *Tibbi* establishment. Your salary will be one thousand rupees a month, all expenses paid, and you will be treated by all those who are connected with the establishment on the footing of a perfect lady."

## CHAPTER XII

### The Forbidden Fruit

"So I was now a beauty-queen. My hours were the same as Mohini's. I left my home at a little before six and went to a house in Sathan. Here I had my make-up done for me by the *Ustad* himself. And what a change it made in my person ! What a word of grace it lent to my form, and how marvellous was mine ! As I looked in the mirror at myself, I was astounded to see how changed I was. The simple unalloyed beauty that Nature had gifted me with was soft and sober.

This beauty that make-up lent me was enchanting, glamorous, the type that excites. The prostitutes know how to fiill their clients' hearts with sexual urge. They appeal to the vision ; hence this make-up. They seek the avenue of the nose which cause great excitement! Hence the use of scents. They appeal through the sense of hearing. Hence a beautiful voice is cultivated. All these are capable of exciting the sexual impulse. The man seeks a physical union. The prostitute queen refuses to be persuaded. Even if her sexual climax has been reached, she is adamant. The reason is simple. If a pregnancy develops, her trade will have to be suspended for a time, which the establishment can ill-afford to allow. Besides, the ordeal of pregnancy might interfere with her beauty culture, which is her day's programme, more important even than her meals. Hence to rich patron's edge of sexual desire becomes all the more acute. each day he tingles with an uncontrollable passion for the act. He parts with plenty of his money, but then the matron breaks in upon their privacy with one excuse or another, and the client's dream is shattered, but his desire intensified. He calls again and again to be robbed right and left, the queen of his heart placing fresh orders each day, till her orders become almost too tall to be carried out, and the client in that case either drops off of himself, or is in the queen's had graces.

She shows cold, callous indifference, and the more he cringes and crawls the less is he encouraged. If he is shameless enough still to persist in his attention, he is openly snubbed by the matron, who then introduces him to a second rate girl, whom he usually refuses to accept and finally fed up with things takes his departure.

"This was the routine. I need not worry you. Doctor, and your friend with accounts of the heart broke and sent to their doom, with my beauty and

blandishments which both had a predominating element of artificially."

"You are right." put in the Doctor. "There is many a case of insanity that has been brought to my notice. Many men have committed a suicide, and many murders of the rivals in the prostitute's favour have also been brought to light. I tell you the prostitutes are doing incalculable harm to the cause of domestic peace. I wonder why they do not put a stop to this evil by legislation. The prostitutes have wrecked many a home. They have spread death and disease. More men have died victims to their blandishments than were killed in the Great War of 1914."

You too are right, Doctor. But you forget it is the silly sex-ignorant wife, who fails to keep her husband in hand by art as well as by her winning ways, that drives him to the prostitutes. As a doctor you might be expected to know better than to blame death and not the victims who court it. Prostitutes don't go to the husbands. It is the husbands who, failing to find satisfaction at home, run after the prostitutes. Let the housewife go to the prostitute and learn her ways. Let her adopt these ways and keep the husband to herself. The prostitute has no dispute with her. It is her sex ignorance, and society's conspiracy of keeping all sex information from our boys and girls that is really to blame. I shall give you a number of instances how the much maligned prostitute has brought relief to the housewife. My own is a case in point."

**The Romance of a Prostitute.**

We had a girl, Kaushalya by name. She had been sent on by one of the the touts. She was an extremely pretty girl, rather slick and smart, but hopelessly ignorant of what every girl should know. I watched the matron train her in the art of netting a client. She was virgin widow still untouched. Now no prostitute who is a virgin is for obvious reasons, fit for her job. Many who go to her are weakly sexed or suffering from a premature ejaculation. They go away disgusted

never again to return, if they find her too raw to handle. So the prostitute's preparation is essential. To the house-wife preparation. even sex talk is the height of indelicacy and the union is a *begar*. To the prostitute its consummation is an act of the greatest consequence. The former submits herself to it as it were from no will of her own. The latter has made it a fine art. Kaushalya had been taught to make a fine art of the act.

"And you?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, I too had similar instructions, but I was trained not so much for the act as for unburdening the patrons of the cash they had brought with them. Kaushalya completed their ruin.

"I was very thick with Kaushalya. She took me into her confidence, and related to me the story of her life which reads like a fairy tale. I shall produce it in her own words:

### The Story.

"My father was a priest of a second-class shrine which was his personal property. There was plenty of money in the job for besides daily offerings there were two fairs held annually and they brought in a rich harvest. Father was a scholar and was highly respected for his recitations and these brought in a good bit, so that we had enough and to spare.

"It has been noticed that some highly intellectual people are afflicted by certain sexual deviations."

"She was right," broke in the Doctor "Most artists are said to have been homo-sexual. They revelled in watching others on the nude. Even the world's greatest general such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon were sexual perverts The fact is they sought to stimulate their flagging powers by sexual perversions or deviations. These deviations are growing alarmingly and have got to be checked. But that is neither here not there. Pray go on with Kaushalya's story."

"I shall do so, if you are so good as to let me," I added, Kaushalya went on:

"My father was a sexual pervert. And I should think he was not so much to blame. The fact is he had money to burn and time hung heavy on his hands. My mother was a plain woman and she was at the same time a highly pious one. Out of 30 days of the month for seven she was too unclean to let her husband come near her. Then she was having her monthly period. For seven more she was expiating her sins of uncleanliness by a course of unalloyed devotion to and worship of the gods. For another seven she was alternately fasting and doing penance and incantions. She was, perhaps, much too cold to be excited for the act.

"My father watched her doing all that, and since he was over-sexed he took to home-sexuality. I observed all this, and laid the blame at my mother's door. I think a woman's god should be her husband. If she gives herself up to divine meditation she runs the risk of losing her husband as my mother did. He could not help his over-sexuality. He could not help his wife's religious zeal and overbearing ways. And the result was he became a pervert. But to be at the helm of the religious and social affairs and at the same time to degrade oneself by sexual deviations as my father did does not as a rule pass unnoticed. People began to talk and father fell into disgrace in the public eye. The result was he committed suicide. And mother who had been an indirect cause of his degradation sprinkled oil on her person and setting fire to herself became a *sati* They had brought me into the world. I thought they owed a duty to me too. But they were too selfish to think of me. Each died by his or her own hand and left me to face the music alone. I was then sixteen. The head disciple was sixty. He was a widower. He proposed that I should be made to enter into wedlock with him. I abhorred him, in fact I abhorred all who had a religious bent of mind. I thought they knew they were on a wild-goose chase. The ignorant public had to be kept in the dark. If the light of knowledg

spread, they would be enlightened. And if they were where would the priests be living ?

"Did she mean," broke in the Doctor, "that the search for God is a wild-goose chase ?"

"She meant," said I "that the way they look at it isn't the way to attain godlines. It is the way that leads straight on to the Devil and to the infernal regions beyond." Well she went on with her story.

"I hated the old man. But it seems he was crazy about me, and one day as I turned from my devotions, the hypocrite who was at his contemplations finding me alone was going to make an assault on my person, when I screamed. This brought many men into the sanctuary and they were told I was so excited as to break in upon the sanctity of his worship and disturb him in his meditations. I protested that he was a liar. It was his word against mine, and he was an old man and their head priest, whereas I was a young girl and very pretty. They took his word against mine. But there was a youth who was the son of a very rich official. He said I did not look like an insincere girl. But his was a voice in the wilderness. They branded me as a fast woman, and I was ostracized by the *Panchayat.* The youth whose name was Madho Lal was then a student. He had come into a big property through the death of his maternal grandmother. He found lodgings for me and allowed me a handsome allowance for a year. He visited me at night, but never did he force his sexual attentions on me. A startling change came into my life. I had found my fairy prince in flesh. Love had descended on him too like an avalanche. It had swept him off his feet. It was case of pure love which seeks to protect the chastity of the other. Then somehow his people learnt that he was carrying on an affair with me. They imposed restrictions on him which he attempted to break through and got me to vow I would be true to him always. We exchanged pledges like that. One day I was visited by a *Mahatma.* He said he had heard I was being kept as Madho Lal's mistress. Wasn't

I ashamed of myself? I told him I had nothing to be ashamed of, for I was chaste. He dilated on the infidelity of rich men's sins, and said Madho would betray me. Why didn't I wed some good youth of my own status in life? I told him I loved Madho and he loved me.

"The silly talk of a romance," said he, "is a delusion and snare. All romantic matches end in a disaster. If you are crazy about him come to my *ashram* and there you will see him in his true colours."

I promised to visit him the day following at 8 a.m.

That night and the next Madho did not come to my place. He never missed his nightly visits. So his absence caused me great anxiety. The next morning precisely at eight, I went to the *mahatma's* place. He received me in a back chamber and bade me take my seat behind a curtain. Through a hole in this curtain he bade me watch what happened outside. I had hardly been in my hiding place for more than ten minutes when who should come to the *mahatma* but Madho himself. He bowed before the *mahatma* and said, "I am here *Guruji* for the herb you promised."

"Do you really need to be rejuvenated, you who never went to a woman, never performed the sex act with anyone."

"I think I do."

"What makes you think so?"

"I feel I am quite unfit for the consummation of the act."

"Why not call a spade a spade and confess that you are impotent?"

"This unfortunately is the case."

"Are you man enough to own to any one you profess to love that you are unfit to be her husband?"

"I may be healed, *Guruji*."

"Were you always like that?"

"I was sound enough a week ago."

"What went wrong?"

"I don't know. I am now a total bankrupt so far as sexuality is concerned."

The Doctor intervened and said, "Such a thing sometimes happens. It is the result of continence, of chronic sexual stimulation unrelieved by gratification and a congestion of genitalia."

"If you have a bit of patience, I shall explain the whole thing in Kaushalya's own words."

She continued.

"It was a spell cast on you by a witch, who is afraid you are going to look for another bride in spite of your vows of constancy to her."

At this stage the curtain was drawn, and I stood facing Madho.

"Marry the witch if you will and all will soon be over with you," said the *mahatma*.

I need not dilate on the way Madho deserted me, and Sulakhi got me fixed in this establishment. I dare say you know me these facts already. I am fed up with what you call piety. This is why I am giving myself a free licence.

The romance of Kaushalya, was renewed once more. Madho found he couldn't forget her, that life was not worth living without her. He had been given a bit of camphor by the *mahatma* who was their family *guru*, which had temporarily sterilized him. The matron gave him something which soon rejuvenated him. I perceived that the two loved each other. *Ustad* Maula Dad and the *Ustani* made a virtue of necessity and gave their consent and we lost pretty Kaushalya.

A young man who was inclined to be a bit stout visited me one day. He said he was enthralled to see such beauty in a maiden. He seemed to sense my stand-offishness and kept a respectful distance. He felt a bit

awkward in my presence, and taking out a sovereign placed it on the table that lay between us. I did not look at it. He kept gazing at my face and then at the gold coin. And then perhaps thinking it wasn't enough for a present, he added another and pushed them towards me. I was still indifferent. Then he took out a third, and then a fourth, and fifth, and finally a sixth sovereign, and pushed them towards me. " ,hat is all I have in the world," said he, "and I lay them with my hearts at your feet."

"Who are you?" I asked. "My name is Charan Das," he returned.

"What is your calling?"

"I am a petty shopkeeper."

"Are you married?"

"No-yes," he faltered.

"You aren't sure?"

"Well, the fact is," said he, "her parents will not send her to our house."

"Why?"

"Ahem..."

"Yes?"

"Because she did not bring much by way of a dowry, and my mother will not let her settle down till she succeeds in fleecing her parents a bit. Last time she was at our place mother gave her the hiding of her life. She has sent her home and told her she would find a new bride for me, one whose parents would give her a big dowry."

"Isn't your wife a pretty girl?"

"Very."

"Aren't her parents rich?"

"Fairly."

"Why don't you make it up with them?"

"I daren't. You see my shop is a branch of my father's big concern. He will turn me out of the house and the shop."

I got from him his wife's address and handed back the sovereigns bidding him call again the next day. He was afraid I was offended. I told him I was very pleased with him, and would be more so if he agreed to obey me implicitly. He promised to be my slave for life. After that I bade him run home and learn to be a true business man. A busines man never parted with his money as he did. He smiled weakly and went away like a whipped dog.

The *Ustani* was not very well pleased with my generosity. She called it unbusiness-like I had thrown good money away which was going against the gain. The night was spoilt. But she was wrong. We had another visitor. A *he-devil*, sexuality breathing from his coarsened lips. He wanted to pay me court. He was very free with his money, so he was admitted into my presence He was staggered when he saw me. I let him have his fill of feasting the eyes on my face in a lovely pose. He could not hold himself in, and held out his hands to take me into his embrace. I motioned him to a seat, and with a harsh look that I knew how to assume put him in his place. He kept mum for a spell, and then seeing I did not strike, but on the other hand adopted a pleasing manner he made bold to assert his presence. 'I am Ubbas Khan, the hide merchant. I am worth my weight in gold, and I can pay. Here is a hundred-rupee note on account. I must have my heart's desire and will pay you any amount."

"Here was a strange situation. If I had to show I was frigid, I should not have melted into a pleasant smile. He had the advantage now. A prostitute who blows hot and cold with the same breath runs the risk of falling and easy victim to a rich client's rape. He commits the assault, and then makes it worth her while to keep quiet. He drew out another hundred-rupee note, and holding it out to me advanced to have me in

his embrace. I snatched the note, crumped it up and threw it at his face. "You should have the sense to understand that you are in the presence of the Beauty Queen of the Punjab, on whom it isn't safe to try your monkey tricks. I do not have anything to do with a fellow who behaves like a brute. A sensible man who seeks his love to fall into his embrace, first wooes her. Force will be met with force. If you make an ass of yourself servants know how to deal with a cad."

"You seem to have a lot of pep in you, my girl. But you are right; none but the brave deserves the fair. I will certainly not use force. I am a respectable man. I shall not behave like a scoundrel. Now come out, my sweetie, how much shall it be? Just one kiss. How much shall I pay for it?"

"A clean thousand."

"A clean thousand just for a kiss?

"Yes and cheap at the price."

"Let me see, one, two, three, four, five and one you have dropped on the floor. Please accept these in advance. Four I shall pay to-morrow. Let us make a night of it."

"I don't have a night of it with anybody first time he drops into my place from. Heaven knows where. You might be syphlitic for anything I know. Let me get into closer contact with you first. There is plenty of time for it, and for kisses galore. I shall keep your money on account and will fix it up for some other day."

"But that will cause a strain on my nerves, and a tension that might cause any of them to break. It will break my heart if you order me to wait. For H aven's sake let us be united for once."

"You may take your money back, if you like, but please do not be in a hurry. It will cause a friction between us."

"Oh! will it? Then I shall be patient. I can wait till to-morrow. Will it be then?"

"Not to-morrow. It will be a week, at least. Mean-

while let us part as I am somewhat fagged, and would like to retire for the night."

We parted as the best of friends. He had a kiss, of course, but I made it a light and formal affair.

When he was gone, I was joined by the *Ustani Sahiba*. She admired my pluck but thought I was tactless. Too much bluntness might go down with a few but it generally made for unpopularity with men. Anyway, I had had my way. Now she claimed this six notes. I refused to surrender the amount. I told her she had had her fee at the door. She was greatly excited and the noise brought in *Ustad* Maula Dad, who was persuasive I agreed to part with half the amount. It was decided for the future that I should keep half of all I got, paying them 50 per cent royalty.

The next morning I visited Charn Das' wife's people. They were good folk, the father being an lawyer. He was greatly offended at the way they had treated his daughter, and was contemplating to go to law I persuaded him to keep cool, and assured him that everything would be all right. The mother kept abusing them all the time, but the father was a sensible man. I promised to bring the husband of the girl to their house every night about ten. I did not tell them who I really was. They were under the impression I was a lady reformer and my duty it was to help all the maidens in distress. The girl was slim rather pretty maiden, and struck me as an obedient child. I had a long talk with her in private. I explained to her how she was to conduct herself in his presence. No shyness ......only superficial standoffishness to give him an impression of modesty. I taught her the art of make-up. It is glaring beanty that does the trick. She was to be dressed in such a way that a slight pull at the ribbon on left shoulder would send the *lingerie* down in a heap, presenting her sweetly scented form to his wondering gaze. She should make a show of modesty by trying to run away from him to hide her semi-nakedness under her bed-sheet. If he followed suit, her battle was won.

"Charan Dass called that evening, as usual, but he came at seven. I bade him go and return at nine. Seven was too early. He came at nine. I trained him in the art of love making. I taught him to be very cautious and gentle with the girls I was going to present him to. He said he wan ed none but myself. I pointed out to him his promise to obey me implicitlv. He should start from the bottom rung. I was at the top. He might come up to me one day. Then I took him into my confidence, and explained to him how he was to work up to a passionate desire for the act in his own wife. It was quite a novel experience and he readily fell in with my plan. I left him at his wife's door, and taking from him a promise to return to me next night at the usual hour, I went home to retire for the night.

Charan Dass came at the usual hour. He said he had never experienced such delight in all his life. He would visit his wife every day. I bade him be cautious about the congress taking place not oftener than twice a month. I explained to him to catch her desire when it was at its highest which was two days before the menstrual flow and nine days after it. There is no harm in repeating the act three or four times after the ninth day. His visits began to be fewer and fewer, till after a year we had a causal meeting in the street. He informed me that the cat was out of the bag, but it was all for the best, for his wife being in the family way, was now admitted to their home, and they were happily settled.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Slave Traffic.

Ubbas Khan was obstinate. He wanted me to yield but I was obdurate. I had explained to *Ustani Sahiba* to surprise us when he became a bit too irksome. It ended in a compromise. He was admitted to Khurshid Bano's bed chamber, and was so pleased with her that he dropped me.

We had a new arrival, a pretty woman in the neighbourhood of twenty-five. Her name was Parmesri but we dubbed her Akhtar Bano. Akhtar, *Ustani Sahiba* said, is a star. Her eyes twinkled like a star. She was a star-eyed widow. She told me her story. I shall produce it in her own words:

**The Story of a Widow.**

"I was brought up as an orphan, firstly because I was a fondling, and secondly because the people who adopted me somehow came to have it in their heads that I was a child of ill-omen. They made some little contribution to the orphanage of their town and were made patrons of the institution. They patronised it, so that they sent their own adopted daughter to be brought up there as an orphan.

"I was then a child. The manager fondled me a bit, partly, perhaps, because I was a winsome child, and partly also because I had been sent on by a patron of orphanage. One of the masters who taught us *Deo Nagri* patted me a lot, and everybody about the place toyed with me lovingly, because of the same or similar reasons. And the result was by the time I was thirteen I was a spoilt child, with the temper of a shrew, and the disposition of a virago.

"We had attached to the orphanage a widow's home or *ashram*, which too was under the same management. They were good people, the organisers of the establishments, making some sacrifices to keep a root over our heads, but the staff responsible for running the whole show was—well, how can I describe them? You know the type they call punctilious, very exact, and very exacting. That's the word. I shall give you an illustration. One of our young widows, Sudarshan by name, who was rather plain was down with typhoid. She wasn't to be moved from her bed even to evacuate her bladder or her bowels. Such were the doctor's orders. But when the morning and evening prayers were said, everybody was called upon to sit up in bed or on the floor to join in the prayers. Even Sudar-

shan was made to sit up. Her case got worse and she died. A few hours beforee her death I remember Sudarshan being raised in her bed to join in the prayers. It was most probably this movement in enteric fever that carried the poor girl away !

"The widows are under a ban. It is the their sins in this incarnation or in a previous one that caused their husband's death. So like a guilty one they pass their days in terror of an enigmatic fate. The priest who knows how to play upon their emotions keeps them under perpetual subjection, and if the said priest is characterless, the widow has to live the life of a prostitute. The president of our *ashram* was a Rai Bahadur, a big landed proprietor. He had discarded the orthodox belief that once a woman is a widow, she is all her life a widow. He was an advocate of widow remarriage scheme. He notified the names of girls eligible for marriage. and made no bones about snding out the photographs of the inmates of the *ashram*. If a person presumably a widower who sought a match in his own caste could not find a suitable companion for life, he applied to this *ashram*. The Rai Bahadur would show him the photographs and then he would make his choice. Before the actual ceremony took place, the bridegroom was requested to pay something towards the funds of the *ashram*. If he paid less than the price that the Rai Bahadur had set upon the woman in his private books. the Rai Bahadur would put forth an obstacle in the way of the match. He would offer other girls he was prepared to give up at that price. He even went so far as to name some fictitious person who was prepared to help the *ashram* to the extent of......(he would name the amount he was prepared to charge for the woman).

"I know these facts for such a thing happened in my own case. My photograph had been taken thirteen times. One day I was told to appear in my Sunday suit as the Rai Bahadur wanted to see me. Sarlo the matron, spent something like an hour over my toilet, she used powder and cream and scents and all sorts of

cosmetics, and I was presented before the Rai Bahadur in the make-up of an actress. The Rai Bahadur was not alone. He had with him another person who as far as I could judge was old enough to be my father. I noticed that the Rai Bahadur turned to this man with the air of a merchant who had scored a hit in presenting the rarest of gems at a cost that was a bargain at the price. The effect was dramatic.

"It is OK." returned the man.

"It is A one, I tell you," said the Rai Bahadur.

This talk was in Engligh. The clerk who had conducted me to the Rai Bahadur's office explained to me afterwards what they had said. He told me also what their object was. They were contemplating matrimony, and the old bulky fellow was going to be my future husband. I was then fifteen and the man must have been fifty, if he was a day. We the inmates of the *ashram*, had no voice in the matter. No woman in this country has a voice in this matter of such vital importance to her happiness. So the bargain must have been struck, for a day was fixed for my wedding. The nuptial ceremony takes place at an auspicious hour determined by the astrologer. Precisely at that fixed hour the ceremony must take place. If the function is delayed even by a econd, the marriage is considered to be null and void. So every preparation had been made for the function long before the hour. The man was seated with me on a footstool, when orders were brought that the wedding must be postponed. It was postponed. I learnt from the clerk because the bridegroom's cheque for five thousand rupees had been dishonoured. He somehow managed to pay the amount to enable him to wed me the next day. You don't know what it means to the aspirations of a young girl in the heyday of her life when she finds herself wedded to a man who is just approaching the pay day of his life. Her spirits sink low, and she wishes she were dead But even death can't be had for the asking. All one can do is to harden one's heart and let things drift along.

"I had a stepson Tarlochan Das, who was twenty-six. His wife was older than I was. So my stepson and my stepdaughter-in-law were both older than I was. The stepdaughter was plain; and her husband had a weakness for a pretty face. It was owing to this weakness that he looked upon me with favour, aad did as I bade him more readily than he did his wife's bidding. So naturally there sprang up a sort of jealousy between us. So long as my husband was alive, I was the queen of the house, and nobody dared to question my authority. But he was asthmatic and often he was so ill I was afraid he was on his last legs, and every minute was going to be his last. But he was; tough and pulled through anyhow. His power of resistance was great indeed, but it wasn't inexhaustible. He soon felt he was sinking, and did sink down at last leaving me practically a virgin widow.

"He told me before his death that he was leaving all his property to me. I thought it all was mine, now that he had passed it on by word of mouth, I did not know there should have been a written deed, duly registered.

"When we had done with the rites, Tarlochan Das approached me one day to ask me what I intended doing now that I was a widow. I told him I did not know what I ought to do.

" Of course, you don't," said he. "But as a rule most widows go to Hardwar, have their hair cropped, and served the *mahatmas*, and do penance to expiate their sins of this as well past incarnation.

"To part with my beautiful tresses! Not a bit of it." I said to him. " But how am I going to manage the estate? Your father passed it on to me."

"Did he? Well it is news to me. He passed it on to me though, by a registered will."

"But he said he was leaving it all to me."

"He must be raving. No one leaves a property to another in the way you describe. One has to send for a lawyer and have a will drawn. This will has to be

presented to the Registrar, who is a Government official and keeps a copy of the record, and then will is said to have been duly made and valid. I suppose you understand that."

"I understood that only too well. I was now to live on my daughter-in-law's charity, and there was no love lost between us. She forgot that even though I was younger than she was, still I was her mother-in-law. She forgot that I had been the queen of the house, and if I had to come down, the humilation should be a gradual affair. She forgot that I had a heart, and even though my husband was dead, I still had a spark of feeling in me. She ruthlessly criticised all my movements. She found fault with my person, my clothes, my diet, my talk, in short with everything that was mine. She openly insulted me before my servants. I had an old maid who was very sympathetic. She sent her away saying it was not met that I should keep a maid servant now that I was a widow. She quarrelled with me over trifles, and when her husband sided with me, she called me a fast woman. She said I was preparing a net for her husband.

"One summer noon as I was asleep the *dhobi* who had called for the wash was sent into my bedroom to get the counterpane. He did not know I was asleep and in the dark pulled my bed-clothes causing me to scream. He sought to rush but someone had chained the door from without. He raised a cry and gathered the women of the street and men too.

I was presented before the *Panchayat* the next day, and the *Sarpanch*, an old man called me to his home and offered to vindicate my honour, if I agreed to yield my person to him. I refused to degrade myself. The consequence was I was ostracized, and having nowhere to go to, lived with the matron in the *ashram* for a few days. But my notoriety as a fast woman had reached the president's ears, and so I was expelled.

Just then as I thought I had nowhere on earth to turn to, I was accosted by an old lady who took

me home and made money out of selling my honour to young men.

*Ustad* Maula Dad heard of me and brought me here. Here I am secure from the depredations of infected persons, and although I have to yield my person to any number of persons and pretend that I am enjoying the act which I execrate, I am at least financially secure These people give me half of my earnings which amount to a lot.

I am aware that the life of a prostitute is short, that she soon suffers from fell diseases, and dies either in a mental hospital or a victim to tuberculosis. But I have nowhere to go to. It I drop this profession, what else can I do?

I need not dwell on the life she led. She was oversexed, and had the largest practice among us. And she was very pretty too. She might take my place when I was expelled or left of my own accord. But what was I to do? I too had nowhere to go.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A Double Tragedy

The woman's lot is deplorable. The story of a double tragedy related to me by Mrs. Turner recurs itself in my memory. It was related to her by a colleague. I shall reproduce it in the words of Mrs. Bennerji, the said colleague.

I can recall that sweet gentle face of Najima's. It haunts me in my sleep. It sometimes strikes such terror into my unsophisticated spirit as to cause me to sweat even in the inclemency of our Christmas weather. And yet she was a harmless enough child. She had been taught to lick the hand that hit her, and a lot of licking is involved, for seeking to lick her into shape, her brute of a husband gave her many a licking, that ended in licking her not only out of shape, but out of life as well.

She came into my life, or rather I came into hers

when she was in the throes of labour. It was the old story. The lying in room was dark dingy, and much too stuffy to be habitable. The monthly nurse or midwife filled with wrong ideas and queer old-fashioned notions had actually killed the little one even in the first stage of labour causing infection or blood-poisoning. The poor girl was already suffering from green-sickness, and on top of it came childbed-fever, we call puerperal sepsis. It was at this stage that I was ushered into the patient's bedroom. She had been reduced to a skeleton, but being a country girl she must have had an abnormal capacity to resist all manner of disease to be able to linger on like that.

I could persuade them them to send her to the maternity ward, where I told them she might still have a chance to live. In their home she was doomed. So they placed her under my treatment, in the maternity home. of course.

We obstetricians like myself or like Doctor Rivaz Akhtar who was an expert *accoucheur* in our hospital see so much of human suffering as almost to become callous or hard-hearted and indifferent to the patients' torturous pains of labour. Their agonies leave us cold. It is but natural that we should come to have a heart of stone. Without being very unfeeling we cannot keep a cool head for the operations. But we are not soulless. We too are human, and now and again I come across a patient towards whom I am instinctively drawn. of whom my common sense whispers urgently : "Here is the girl after your heart. It is on such that we concentrate and it is concentration by the doctor or the midwife that helps drag a patient out of the jaws of death. Such a lot of persons who are seriouly ill haven't much of a chance in a hospital, whose wards are overcrowded, and whose doctors are overworked. Dr. Riyaz Akhtar who was also otherwise qualified was indeed overworked. He never came into the maternity ward. He was only a consulting physician, to whom we could refer in complicated cases.

Knowing as I did, how busy he was at all hours. I seldom referred to him for advice. But when Najima's fever would not leave her, and her conditions became graver and graver every day, I did go to Akhtar, and under his directions was successful in rendering the girl a lot of help, so that her fever subsided, but it did not leave her entirely. I was afraid she was fast developing T.B. but none of us was a T. B. specialist, and even if Dr. Akhtar were one he would have positively refused to handle to a T.B. case in our ward. I had much liking for Najima. I did not report to Dr. Akhtar that she was suspected of having developed T.B. lest he should order that the girl be segregated. The fact was in my heart. I prayed she should not develop T.B. and had a sort of intiution that she had not that fell disease. I learnt from Dr. Akhtar that a new system of healing had been introduced in the West, by which without any drugs a patient could be easily healed by what they called auto-suggestion. I was to suggest to her that she was improving day by day, and would soon be quite well again. I was to divert her attention from her physical infirmities, and she would soon not only forget them, but be healthy and strong again. She had the evil habit of dwelling *ad nauseam* on her trival ailments. So in order to distract her thoughts and lead them into healthier channels, I told her a lot about life in London.

"You belong to London?" she asked.

"No," I replied, "I am an Anglo-Indian. I hail from Calcutta."

"What is an Anglo-Indian?"

"An English person who makes India his home is an Anglow-Indian."

"Are you English?"

"No. My father who is a Bengalee gentleman, was domiciled in England. He was bred, educated, and married in England. My mother was English. She

belonged to Yorkshire, but settled down with my father in Piccadilly. My grandfather was a very well-to do zemindar, but since father had married out of caste, he disinherited him, and then father had to fall back on his own resources. I was born in Piccadilly and when I grew up I was trained for a midwife. Then mother died and father being at a loose end, decided to return to India, to claim if he could, h.s paternal estate.

Grandfather bad passed away and the family estate had come down to an uncle who being a gambler had squandered every penny he could raise on it by mortgage. Father being too old for work I took up work in the hospital. He now lives with me, sadder but so much the wiser for his experiences in London."

"Does he deprecate London life?"

"He isn't overpleased with it. He often relates to me some very exciting incidents, some striking events from his own or his friends' lives, and let me tell you the picture isn't very alluring. I could give you a few snatches from here and there if you are interested."

Najima was curious. She said she would be delighted to hear them. It was merely to amuse her and make her interested in life's activities so that she should have one more grip on life and thus indirectly help to effect a speedy cure, that I gave her the following that I had from my father.

"London is a mighty city, mightier by far than Paris, even mightier then New York."

"Yes" remarked Najima, "my tutor used to tell me London is the biggest city in the world but how big he had no idea."

"As a sight it is unapproachable by day. By night it is the most wonderful spectacle in the world. For sheer downight impressiveness it grips one's imagination even more at night than it does by day."

"Electric lights?"

"Yes, and are lights, and all sorts of lights of different tints. But it isn't the lights that are of interest. It is the ladies."

"The ladies of London? H'm! Are they all fair like you, or is there a sprinkling of fair faces in a sea of darkness as in this country?"

"They are all fair-complexioned, although every one of them is not a pretty face. There are plain ones too, but since beauty culture is the rage, the plain ones are an exception."

"Don't they hide their looks behind a veil?"

"No. They don't believe in *purdah*."

"Surely they cannot be called chaste women without hiding their looks behind the veil."

"They are chaste enough as women go. But there are black sheep among them, as there are black sheep among us."

"Don't you think barefaced shamelessness encourages lust?"

"Lust has nothing in common with barefacedness and chastity is not the monopoly of those who hide their looks behind a veil. I am an Anglo Indian, but I know lots of Indian maidens as pretty as you please who have applied to me to help them out of a nasty situation. Illicit love has bitter fruit. I haven't helped any to abort, but helped them to deliver bonny, bright babies instead."

"Natural children?"

"Yes, one such child, the loveliest little thing I have ever come across was left to us by her mother only a few months ago. I am bringing her up as my own child."

"Don't they have such children in other countries?"

"Lots of them. But there they have homes for them. Such homes are called children's homes. They are maintained by charity."

"They must be prostitutes who give birth to such chidren and then discard them?"

"Not by any means. It is an innocent maiden, here and there the victim of a cad's so-called romantic love. Neither the youth nor the maidens see any use for howling brats. They are supposed to be out of fashion. So they attempt to get rid of them even unborn, and failing that immediately after birth. The much too modern girls smoke, are neutrotic, artificial naked vamps. Our Indian men could not tolerate them. Even their own men have for them a secret but profound contempt. But beauty and culture being the modern craze, they know how to exercise their artificial charm on the more impressionable men. They are impertinent, seductive, passionate.

"The Indian girl, on the other hand, is hopelessly sex shy. She is ignorant, cold, indifferent. And she has imbibed from her forefathers an absurd notion that it is highly immoral to discuss sex before youth, as it would give food for their morbid fancies. This fear is responsible for the silence and mystery which "have for so long been wrapped round sex."

"You mean we should freely talk of our private relations?"

"You make sex a strictly private affair and fight shy of talking it. You look upon it as though it were a vice. A sexual derangement in your eyes is as vicious as stealing is vicious. You hide both. If instead of practising vice you had the courage of making a clean breast of it, you would soon learn to subdue your passions and reform would be effected automatically. A widow is a widow all her life, and either takes to vice in private, or suffers tortures through forced continence. If she had the courage to revolt against the exsisting social order, and openly declared that she could not and therefore would not kill her sexual urge, this curse of forced widowhood could be wiped out in a day."

"It isn't so much sex ignorance as the haughty,

overbearing and callous attitude of the males toward us females that is killing us Indian women. Mine is a case in point."

### My Torturing Husband

I am the daughter of a peasant proprietor. My father Khuda Bakhsh had a small impartible holding in Julli, a village in the Jhelum District. My mother had been dead some years. Father, elder brother, Karim Bakhsh, aged twelve and I aged nine lived in a neat little cottage that stood apart from the village all by itself in a plot purchased by my father after my mother's death. He wasn't entirely a recluse, but the shock of my mother's death had been so great that he could not bear to live surrounded by his old associations

He said he wanted a bit of peace. Hence the erection of this cottage which he 'called the hermitage.'

Ours was a small village, and smaller fry you know are devoured by the bigger ones, so it was being fast encroached upon by the neighbouring village Tahli which certainly was a big affair, with a school, which was either a District Board School or a private one managed by the *Anjuman*.

Father's cousin, Jalal Din, had a bigger holding at Tahli. He had a son. The boy's name was Rahma , and he too was the same age as Karim. Karim was handsome and so was Rahmat, but Karim was robust. and Rahmat poor soul, was of rather a lighter build. He had a delicate frame and was effeminate in his ways partly because being an only child he had been fondled and caressed by the woman-folk far more than was good for him, and partly because he had been ailing ever since he saw light of day, having to be operated upon thrice for serious complications, and snatched from the jaws of death four times because of typhus and scralet fever.

Rahmat's father Jalal-ud-Din, did not plough his fields himself. He used hired labour, and even though

his holdings were more extensive than father's, he was not supposed to earn much more than my father did on his limited farm. Jalal-ud-Din was an easy-going *Lambardar*, and father was a hard-worked peasant. Jalal ud-Din was looked upon as a landlord, and father, even though he was the undisputed lord of his holding, was a mere ryot, in the public eye. We talk a whole lot about the dignity of labour, but as an actual fact we look down upon, if not hate, manual labourers. Father was a typical Indian farmer, and much was averse to innovations. He did not believe in educating us. "Will letters make us better bargainers?" he asked, "Will they make Karim a better hand at the plough?"

Jalal-ud-Din had higher aspirations for Rahmat. He believed a good schooling would make him worth more on the land. He sent Rahmat to school. He would certainly not make his son a mere ryot. His ambition was that his boy should be a Tahsildar, before whom all the royts of Karim's type should bow. When father heard of Jalal's ambition for his son, he too started sending Karim to school, not because he had all at once been inspired by any extraordinary enthusiasm for education, but because of sheer envy. What was good enough for his cousin's son was good enough for him. If Rahmat could do with a Tehsildarship so could Karim. Of the mental and spiritual value of education they were both ignorant.

So it happened that Rahmat and Karim were admitted to the same class. One day father visited the school and asked the schoolmaster what chances of a Tahsildarship there were for his son. "Not many" was the schoolmaster's ready response.

When asked if Ramat would be a Tehsildar when he grew up, he said he could not say. He was a little better than Karim. This wasn't good news. It set my father thinking. "Rahmat a little better than Karim!" He could not believe his ears. The master must be mistaken. His Karim was decidedly better than that puny good-for-nothing boy of his cousin's.

Why he wasn't fit to be a chowkidar of Julli. Even a half-starved beggar of a thief slinking in the shadows would knock him down. The master must have been bribed by Jalal-ud-Din. He was certainly doing his son very great injustice.

"You mean to suggest," he asked in vexatious tones, "that booby bag of bones is better fitted to be a Tehsildar than my son?" "No. *Maulvi Sahib*, you do not know what you are talking about.

The *Maulvi* was discreet. He decided to honour my father, and at the same time make a bit of money out of him.

"Your son has better brains than any other boy in his class; but perhaps you are not aware. Government posts go only to those who show themselves better than the others, because there aren't posts enough to go round. It is, as it were, the case of the fittest coming to the top. The Government hold competitive tests. It isn't success in them that counts. It is as I said coming ont at the top. Your son can pass, but can he come out at the top? That is the question."

"You think he can't" said father with some heat.

"Who said he cant't? But you know it is the early bird that catches the worm. Your son joined late, very late. He has to make up for lost time"

He was right. Karim was a late comer. He must make up for lost time. Father was bent on seeing that Karim did make up for lost time. So he said:

"Karim did join late, *Maulvi Sahib*. But it is up to a capable man like you to see that he does not suffer on that account. I am a poor peasant: still I shall make it worth your while if you make him fit for the job of a Tehsildar."

The upshot of this talk was that the *Maulvi's* son, a student of an upper class was engaged on Rs. 2 a month to help Karim in making up for lost time.

He started his job at our place, and taught him in our living room in my presence, for even at nine, I passed for a baby. He came at noon and passed some

four or five hours on the job. Father was usually out on his farm. He persuaded me too to start my lessons. A first it was a mere diversion, but by and by it became hard. I need not tell you how diligently he taught us. Karim soon picked up enough to be the top student of his class and I too went neck and neck with him. It was a jolly team of workers, the three of us. Akhtar was very unprepossessing in his general appearance, but he was so sympathetic so deeply interested in our progress, we took a great liking to him. He was a strict disciplinarian. If Karim failed to repeat his lessons word for word, he slapped his checks and if I did it, he slapped mine rather cruelly I suppose. He belaboured us, him as well as me, for our errors of omission and commission. He tortured us both alike. I remember once he gave me sixteen hard cuts on the palms of my hands with such vigour as to cause me to cry in anguish, and rathtr than spare me after a fit of sobbing, he bade me be a cock for some time, and even in my sobs he did not stop his cuts, so that he broke his stick on my back.

His manner towards us was cool, calculating, callous. When I erred for the first time, he only warned me. For the second error he pinched my nose and let himself go, first at one cheek, until it was scarlet, and then at the other but all the time his slaps or his cuts were descending even though they were so terrific, he did not betray that he was angry, but kept talking almost pleasantly with the victim of his blows. Tears or supplications failed to melt him. He used to say he must administer the dose to heal us of our intellectual ills. He did heal Karim of his lethargic ways and me too of my lazy habits

When Rahmat saw how clever Karim had become by Akhtar's attentions, he sought to buy him off by offering him even five rupees to drop us and take him up. He would not drop us, however. And was sorry he hadn't any more time to take Rahmat up. Rahmat's father too took the question with Akhtar's father, but

the stout-willed lad refused to be bribed. He said he had taken up work with us already. He could not, under any circumstances, be persuad d to let us down.

Rahmat could not brook the idea of being daily degraded in the class, much less could he bear to see Karim's steady advance. And when by and by it got talked about that Karim was going to be promoted to the next higher class, it was the last straw that just fell short of breaking the proverbial camel's back. He thought of a plan. If the well did not come to him, thirsty as he was, why he should not go to the well himself? So swallowing his pride he decided to come to our house and share our lessons, if we had no objection We had none Of course, it meant additional labour to Akhtar, but Rahmat promised to make it worth his while. Akhtar objected that our work would suffer, but when I said it would not make any difference, he reluctantly allowed him to join our group.

Rahmat was hopless as a student. His attention wavered— I mean he lacked capacity to concentrate. Akhtar's terrible tortures and hard knocks, and what he termed grinding his bones, at first did not avail He made him lie flat on the ground, fold his legs on his stomach and passed his arms by his knees. his elbows touching his ankles, where he rightly fastened his wrists. Then through the grooves between the arms and the legs he passed a thick staff and let him lie what he called a 'crow.' This form of torture, too, to which he subjected him almost every day breaking stick after stick on him in that pose did not seem to avail. His cheeks were sore and bloody, his skin covered all over with weals, but he did not make any headway.

It seemed Akhtar was exhausted one day. his fatigue resulting from the corporal punishment he had been inflicting on the three of us. But he had more occasions even on that day use the lash on Rahmat. He ordered Karim to do it hard. Perhaps, he thought, this humiliation would arouse a sense of shame in the boy. It didn't. Rahmat thereafter was belaboured not only by Akhtar, but also by Karim, who too did it

with a vengeance under orders, of course; but it did not seem to have any effect on him. He rather enjoyed the thrashings. Anyway, they did not fail to amuse him. Akhtar was at a loose end. He could not make up his mind what to do. One day he bade me go to Rahmat, and slap his cheeks as hard as I could. I did best, but that wasn't much of a slapping. They must have fallen on him like rose petals. And my cuts too could not have hurt him much. But this was regarded by him as a sort of humiliation which was more than he could stand. He started applying himself thereafter, and in consequence made further and further advances in his studies.

Years rolled by, and I grew up to be a pretty maiden. I told you I was under Akhtar's thumb. He could order me about as he pleased. He was still harsh, but his harshness had a note of sympathy about it, so that I soon began to look upon him as a sincere friend. He let his glance linger on me longer than it was warranted by attention as my tutor. He tapped my cheeks and his touch seemed to send a thrill of joy through my veins. He even attempted to have me alone, so that when all the three of us had to be cocks, he let me sit up sooner than the others, and holding my chin between his forefinger and thumb held up my face to his, and made as if he was going to kiss me, bringing his lips near mine, but stopping short of the actual embrace.

I am not ashaned to confess he did kiss me now and again. These stolen kisses filled my heart with love for Akhtar. I became conscious of a growing passion for him. And his eyes had that sparkle and glow in them which only an overpowering love can provoke. When we were alone, he gathered me to his heart and the lingering embrace brought me an ecstasy of joy.

Then Akhtar took his Matric and passed in first division, even as a private student. He got me to promise I would persuade my father to let him wed me. He would speak to his. It wasn't any use. Mother had pledged my hand to Rahmat and I must wed no one

but him. A dead person's wishes had to be respected anyhow. Akhtar went to Amritsar for his S.A.S. course, and I was wedded to Rahmat according to plan, and went to my parents-in-law's house.

Rahmat was still at school, but he was not making his way. He did not find himself fit to carry on with his class. Without Akhtar's or anybody else's help, he did not have the ghost of a chance. His father was giving him a long rope, and he had fallen into bad company and was thoroughly bad, a rotten egg. I need not bore you with a long description of my married life. Suffice it say that it was not married love. It was married hate. He hated the very sight of my face. Perhaps he was suspicious. Perhaps he resented my early blows. I do not know the reason why there was no love lost between us. And he being a man, and I the weaker vessel, he had the wip hand, and used the lash with a vengeance. He took a diabolical pleasure in causing me pain. It was killing me to be forced to live with a man I execrated. It was worse than hell to tolerate his blows But a woman has low status in an Indian family. She can claim nothing as a matter of right. She is born to suffer and weep, and suffer again, and weep once more, and die weeping because God has created her to slave for her self-styled lord, who has ordained that she should bear and forbear.

I was with child. It couldn't be Akhtar's child for we never met after my wedding, but my husband had his suspicions and beat me so mercilessly, and tortured me so, that he must have killed my baby.

"This is my story."

I asked her to give me an idea of what Akhtar looked like. She described him. It was the description of Riyaz Akhtar, my colleague in the hospital. I made the greatest mistake of my life, which I shall ever rue.

Najima was asleep. I brought Dr. Riyaz Akhtar in somehow. Just as he entered, she opened her eyes. There was an expression in them that betrayed her amazement at the sight of him. "You here!" she

exclaimed. " Why, you were having it out with me in Heaven ! And this is Hell. Go back my love, and you will see me there anon."

She fell back, and when we reached her bed, she was cold in death.

Riyaz Akhtar too died soon after of a broken heart.

## CHAPTER XV

### Love's Labour Lost

The prostitute who must pose before her admirers as though she were very well pleased with life, is the most miserable creature in the world. Even though she has had her share of life's vicissitudes, she is an unsophisticated food, when she joins the ranks. She is under the impression that she can hold her own against any odds. Men she thinks can be easily befooled by woman's wiles, of which she learns a lot from the *Ustani Sahiba.* She is taught to use her physical charm to rob her victims. She is expected to be a blood-sucker, a vamp. She must be highly sensual, and not at all afflicted with sentiments. If she chooses to think that flung as she is in the midst of turbulent waters, she would still manage to keep her garments dry, she is soon undeceived. If she is heartless, cruel, rapacious, well so are some of her visitors in whose hands she is no more than a lamb in the grip of a ravenous wolf. They respect her person to a limit, but if they pay her liberally, they expect her to be a passive tool, and if she goes on postponing the pleasure indefinitely, well they know how to use force, and then Heaven help the vamp. Your friend knows my story. I remember having confessed to him the wretched state of my existence, how I would prefer death by my own hand to being forced to continue as prositute, and how .....

Gangoo who had been feeling a bit restless, said he felt he must go out to evacuate his bowels, and asked if there were any restrictions, as it was apparently a

ladies' colony, I sent for the sentinel, and bade her lead Gangos to the jungle across the border and explain to the sentinel there that he was my guest. He should be brought back and conducted to the guest house, where a pretty maiden would be waiting for him. He was her father.

The Doctor was apparently in a trance. I broke in upon his reverie.

A rich man Sadanand by name had lost his wife. He wished to be happily settled once more. Gangoo was his servant, and he had had an eye on me for long. He knew the man's weakness for a pretty face. So he led him one day into my web, I mean the Anarkali house, where I practised as a musician. I need not conceal from you the fact that I fell head over ears in love with him. He too returned the passion But he was rather timid. He offered to take me to Hardwar where I should expiate my sins, and we should wed and settle down. It was impossible to carry on at Lahore, so 1 resigned my office as Beauty Queen, and we came to Hardwar,—Sadanand, Gangoo and I. We were not wedded, for before the celebration could take plaee, Sadanand took cholera and died. He had left some money. So Gangoo and I lived at Hardwar as man and wife for more than a year. We weren't married, though. Having been prostitute for so long, I had ceased to have any scruples that way.

Then there was the birth of Sheela. She was a natural child. My first child, and that too natural! I wished her dead and wished myself dead too. But even death cannot be had for the asking. On the fourth day we went to the Ganages for a bath. Gangoo was carrying Sheela, and I carried my clothes. I went into the river and was carried away by the current. They must have thought I was taking a swim, but I was drowning. I lost consciousness, and when I came to I found myself in this colony. I had been almost dead, but these people nursed me back to life.

I noticed that the Doctor was getting more and more impatient. I asked if he too felt like easing himself. He said he wanted to be conducted to the guest-house. I sent for the sentinel and bade her conduct my friend to guest house No. 2.

The next day after he had rested, I called to see him and got from him the story of Gangoo's life, and their adventure in search of Sheela, which I here reproduce, in the Doctor's own words.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Back From Across

"O Doctor! can you come at once? Our girl who died this morning has been dragged down from the funeral pyre, for she betray signs of returning consciousness."

The speaker who was frightfully agitated was Gangoo, an old domestic, who in the early days of my father's practice as a qualified physician used to do odd jobs for him, washing his bottles and dusting his furniture. Since Gangoo was then a very handsome boy and something of a loose fish, and was rather free with my father my father came in for a liberal share of strictures passed on those who are supposed to be afflicted with moral turpitude. Gangoo had to go before my father could wed, but they met on the sly, for there had grown between them a sort of attachment, which even the conjugal ties could not break.

After my father's death, when I came into his lucrative practice, Gangoo still was my most devoted supporter, and in his own poor way a partron of my skill. For my father's son he once told me had a tender place in his heart.

He had a way of his own with women, so that thanks to his influence, I soon came to have a large number of women patients.

'Our girl' was the virgin widow of Seth Chuni Lal.

I had seen her so often before. She was lovelv from the toe of her little shoe to the top of her golden head. Her skin had the creamy tint and texture of a brown egg-shell, her black almond eyes looked innocently from under perfectly arched eye-brows and through lashes so long that they seemed to cast a palpable shadow on her softly rounded cheeks. She was the very image of loveliness.

She once came to my clinic to have her throat painted. As I touched her chin, she looked into my eyes. The smoothness of her skin and the bewilderment of a fawn betrayed by those brilliant orbs was deliciously thrilling. When she was going to pass out, she turned fully to gaze upon me, and I think I could read in those appealing eyes a message of cordiality, which I had missed in them when she came in. This beautiful widow I was told had revived. I never knew she was ill, and I was their family doctor. But she was a widow and an ailing widow even in a wealthy family does not sometimes receive the attention she deserves. To work her late husband's salvation, and expiate her sins of omission and commission, what better fate than that of an early death! To this end they used to burn them at the funeral pyre with their husbands. But this was when the orthodox people had their way. Now it was different.

I hastened to the cremation grounds. Sheela, the virgin widow, had been laid upon a platform round a *peepal* tree. Her face was uncovered, although the rest of her body was still shrouded in a white sheet. The pallor of death was softened into snowy whiteness that made her look ghastly. I could detect a very slight shade of carnation on the cheeks. The nostrils dilated but imperceptibly. I clearly noticed a tremor in the eyelids which were tightly closed. The heart beats were there unmistakably, although they were very feeble. Sheela was passing though the threos of a crisis.

I pronounced that life was not extinct, and that she might survive. Her mother-in-law pooh-poohed

the idea of Sheela's regaining consciousness. She called it a sacrilege to drag down the dead from her high pedestal. Why desecrate a person whose obsequies had already been perfomed? When Sheela for a time defied our attempts to resuscitate her, the old woman reviled and blasphemed the whole lot of us cursing and swearing in impotent rage.

Our labours were rewarded at last. Sheela opened her eyes and moved her lips to say something, but there was no sound in them.

The cringing, fawning, obsequious Gangoo divined her meaning and ran for a cup of water. She quaffed it at a gulp and I think felt refreshed, for in reply to a chorus of questions asked by the mourners, she brought an intelligent look into her eyes, as much as to say she understood. They asked how she felt. Then they asked if she felt better, and half a dozen other questions which meant the same thing. She did not or could not utter a sound in reply. The mother-in-law stepped forward and with great solicitude asked how she had managed to return from across the threshold. She was evidently displeased with her for backsliding.

By and by she picked up strength enough to speak. "Did you see your husband?" someone asked her.

"I saw none," she replied.

"There was not much in common between them," was her mother-in-law's comment.

"But didn't the god who was the presiding magistrate question you about your sins?"

"There was no presiding magistrate," was the reply.

"But the Angel of death? Didn't he drag you to the regions across?

"No one dragged me anywhere. I only went off to sleep."

"But wasn't it painful?"

"It was the most soothing sensation."

"But weren't your actions accounted for ?"

"I only saw the outstanding events of my life pass and repass before my eyes like a panorama of events we meet with in the pictures on a screen."

" And after you were gone, did you remember your loving mother-in-law or any of your girl friends ?"

"No."

This gave the old woman a grievance, so that she began to grumble, and her grumbling caused a restraint in the girl's manner, so that she refused to reply to any further questions. She was told by someone she owed her life to my efforts, and she turned her eyes to me, in mute appeal. I could read a world of gratitude in them. Just then there was some commotion. The police arrived on the scene and taking possession of the patient conducted her to the hospital. Before she left she touched my hand. Her hand-touch produced in me a zest and exhilaration which stirred my blood. Reflected in her eyes I could see the beauty of the world. I knew my love was returned. We were on the threshold of a new life, when something happened that shook my mental equilibrium from its very foundation.

They take things lying down, if a convert to another faith goes the whole hog ; but if a poor helpless widow who has had her obsequies performed has the misfortune to return to life, she is supposed to have swindled the God of Death, and must expiate her sins by going on a pilgrimage to one or more of the holy places, and performing a series of rites and ceremonies. When she had almost recovered from the shock she was ordered by the Pandit to proceed to Hardwar. The mother-in-law and Gangoo were to go with her, and they took me along as their family doctor.

We travelled in Inter Class. Sheela and her mother-in-law were seated in a ladies' compartment. We got a berth in one for males. Our compartment was soon crowded. They had only one other maiden, who, we later learnt, was also going to Hardwar. At Amritsar

Gangoo brought word that the third passenger was a pretty maiden. She was travelling all by herself.

It struck us as rather strange No pretty maiden or plain travels all by herself. She must be a college girl I thought. She was vivacious. Sheela and she were soon hand and glove. The old mother too liked the girl. She had a basket of sweets which she distributed freely. The mother seemed to have a sweet tooth. She partook of them rather freely. Sheela sent some to us, too. Why she did so, I could not cojecture. I did not expect Sheela would be so free with other people's sweets. But it was Sheela's gift, whatever its source. We ate it with great relish. It certainly was very delicious.

There isn't much more to relate. Under the delicate flavour of some sweet scent was hidden the taste of some narcotic. When we came to, it was broad daylight, and the train was in motion. At the next stop we learnt that we had travelled beyond our destination. We rushed to the ladies' compartment to discover that the two girls were missing and the mothe-in-law was still lying senseless. We revived her, of course, but she was abashed to notice that the birds had flown.

Love like electricity is dynamic, mercurial. It leaves you no peace till the object of your search has been found. We ransacked the whole country side in vain. Every private source was tapped without avail. We knew she had disappeared of her own free will, for she could not have been carried away without exciting suspicion, and could not possibly have been tempted to desert us without the most alluring temptation. What could the nature of such a lure be? Certainly not physical. Did she love another even more than she loved me? Gangoo ruled it out. She wasn't wayword. She was extremely modest. She could never have gone with another man. She had none in the world whom she could have loved, unless it were her mother or us both. Her mother was drowned or may be drowned herself, when Sheela was born. I asked Gangoo

if she had spiritual leanings. He wasn't sure. She was attracted by these *mahatmas*, though. Here was a clue. The maiden was spy. She had enticed the poor girl away into the sanctuary of some one of the *mahatmas*.

It was no use seeking police help. She must have been duped into believing it was for her own salvation, and she might refuse to allege that she had been kidnapped. She might assert that she had gone of her own free will. We must trace her unaided by the police, and when she was found, use persuasive methods. She would not yield to force She was an obstinate girl.

I incidentally asked Gangoo how he felt about the loss of Sheela.

"My darling daughter! If I don't find her it will be the death of me," he wailed.

"Your darling daughter?" I interrogated much perturbed. "How do you make it out? Why, you were her menial servant all your life!"

"That doesn't alter the fact. She was my natural child."

"You mean she was natural child?" I asked.

He turned his eyes on me and there was a light in them which pierced me through and through. Then feeling reassured, he asked:

"Would that make any difference?"

"None in the world," was my hot comment.

He placed his icy hand in mine and owned that Sheela was his own darling daughter. He further owned that she was a natural child. Then noticing a pained ed look on my face, he exclaimed:

"I thought it would make all the difference in the world."

"Who says it does? I thundered.

"Taint much of a taint on a fellow's birth I can tell you," he added, "I can cite instances of so many men of means and money who are natural children."

"You don't say so?" I querried.

"I was never more serious in my life."

And he made some staggering disclosures which it would not serve any useful purpose to reveal.

We had settled down at Hardwar. One of us posed as an ascetic to get into touch with maidens from whom he would inquire details of the sort of *mahatmas* or *gurus* who presided over each monastery. Gangoo was the man for the job. He was handsome and he had a way with women. He was installed *parmaan*—a *sadhu* who practised continence. He took his seat near *Har-ki-pori* which is the place frequented by devotes at all hours of the day. He lighted a long fire, and squatted down near it. He was there for days. and sometime for nights too and bided his time till we received the message to hasten to Shanti Nagar forthwith, if we were at all anxious to meet our Sheela, You may be sure we lost no time and followed your messenger here.

"May I hear of your adventures as an ascetic?" she asked.

"Gangoo's reminiscences would read like a fairy tale" I told her.

"I would love to hear them," he said.

I related them in ten nights as they were told me by Gangoo.

## CHAPTER XVII

### First Night

Gangoo was in the blues.

"Had a dull day," he said. "Painful work having to sit stiff and wait. Pursue the shadow and it runs from you. Run from it, and it follows close upon your heels. I had as many as seventeen lady visitors. I made as if I were in deep meditation, as well I might. Not one of them was worth a look, all old hags with wrinkled faces. These women! How they break in upon our thoughts. If they are pretty, their image haunts us. If they are plain, they pester us with their unwelcome attention. Their list of

grievances is much too long. They seek boons galore. They are afraid of our curses. They are very fond of listening to our romantic tales. If have given them the story of four deaf people.

"What is it?"

"The story is that of a pretty maiden who was deaf. By a strange coincidence she came to be married into a family, every member of which including her husband was deaf."

"Not so fast. Please give it to me as you gave it to your audience."

"All right."

'A peasant had a grown-up daughter named Tabo who was a pretty village girl, so pretty, in fact, she sent every village youth crazy about her."

"Can these village maidens be so pretty as that I think beauty is the monopoly of the town girls only."

"You are wrong. Most village maidens up in the hills look a picture of vitality and loveliness with carmine cheeks and dancing eyes. Chamba girls are simply wonderful. They look so beautiful with the warm sunlight playing on them the glow of health in their rosy cheeks, their limbs of pearly whiteness as rounded as a child's. But to come to my story.

"Tabo had looks, and she had admirers all ready to shed their blood to save her a drop of perspiration. But beauty does not only excite passion, if it is seductive as Tabo's was it also excites lust to which no Indian maiden responds, because they are guarded by vigilant eyes. One admirer of Tabo was a Zaildar's són who sought to catch Tabo alone, but Tabo was chaste. She somehow managed to keep out of his way, and was still pure, when she was attacked by malaria which soon became tyhoid. It was a terrible attack and even after the sixth week she was still in bed now reduced to a skeleton, her looks entirely faded, her temper short. They thought it was an attack of tuberculosis and so the socalled lovers droppeod ut

one by one, for who would marry an ailing girl. Tabos great vitality, however, stood her in good stead and she got over her illness, but the after-effect of his prolonged fever was that she was now stone-deaf. The Zaildar's son accosted her one day and asked her a question which would fill every chaste girl with fury, but Tabo unable to make out his words or understand their significance kept mum so that the scoundrel though she was encouraging him. He was just going to take some liberty with her when Tabo realising his devilty dealt such a blow on his left cheek as to bring him to his senses.

"This episode opened her father's eyes to the fact that a girl of a marriageable age should be sent to her parents in-law's house. He approached the Zaildar, but he said his son had no use for a wife who was stone deaf and he himself had no use for a daughter-in-law who could not bring a rich dowry. It was hard work seeking a husband for a deaf maiden but at last a deaf youth was found and the temptation of a gift of two bullocks as dowry persuaded him to have the girl

"Kram Dad and Tabo were duly wedded. Karam was that type of rustic we call stolid, whom physical charm leaves cold. He did not like Tabo very much because she had a delicate constitution. He would have preferred a plain wife who was not the cynoseure of all eyes but who was tough, whom he could yoke to the field labour as he yoked his buffalo But she had brought two good bullocks as her dowry, and he could therefore just tolerate her. One day as he was driving his bullocks to the field he was accosted by two policemen who being strangers asked him to lead the way to the nearest police station. Karam could make neither head nor tail of their request. He said to himself 'Surely these bullocks must be stolen property, else why do these policemen question me?' But he put up a bold face and said they were his wife's dowry and his father-in-law was an honest zemindar, and no

thief. They thought the young peasant was being funny at their expense, a slight which no policeman will ever stand. So they treated him rather roughly, using their batons and marched on. Karam was now labouring under the misapprehension that he had been duped by his father-in-law. The bullocks that had been palmed off upon him as his wife's dowry had not been honestly acquired by his father-in-law. He would take him to task about it. He would certainly send his wife back to her people and not have anything to do with her, till her father would satisfactorily explain his conduct and replace the stolen bullocks by others whose ownership could not be questioned by law. He was working himself up to a state of fury against his wife whose father in his eyes was no better than a felon, when who should arrive in the field but his wife herself. She had come with his midday meal. She had been delayed by her mother-in-law and felt a bit guilty in having brought a late meal. So when she saw how furious her husband was, she tried to excuse herself by laying the blame on his mother's shoulders. He used hot words against her father, and she none the wiser showed by signs that it was his mother who was to blame. This made him still more furious. He slapped her cheeks and taking a thin twig off a tree he broke it on her legs, and thrashed her at leisure, and sent her home with the meal.

"Tabo's skin tingling with pain, she went to her mother in-law and beating her breast and forehead before her stoutly complained to her against her tardiness which she thought had brought on the flogging.

The mother-in-law, as deaf as the rest of them, thought she had brought back the meal because it had not been properly cooked. And it had not been properly done because there was no ghee in the house. Her husband had sold the buffalo-cow which was no longer in milk, and he had not yet brought home the

milch cow which had been promised to be delivered the day bofore. He was planting trees outside his enclosure when his wife approached him and loudly complained against his laziness in not bringing home the milch-cow. He too being deaf supposed she did not like the way he planted trees and as he too was a bit short-tempered, he bade her go to hell for anything he cared. She was a nagging wife picking holes where none were intended to be. He would plant them as he pleased. Unlike the deaf people in the story we should learn to understand each other. Much unhappiness is being caused by one set of people failing to understand the point of view of another."

That's quite it, friend Gangoo. What we lack is the spirit of mutual understanding and accomodation of bearing with others when we may differ from them or may not like their ways. All men cannot think a like, just as they cannot look alike. We never quarrel with a man's face? Then why quarrel with his views?

What we lack is religious toleration. We are too narrow-minded, intolerant of any breaches of cross convention. We are said to be a starving people, yet we spend something like ten crores of rupees (£8,000,000) a weak in the name of religion. Over and above that we spend sixty crores a week as an indirect cost of religion on such things as religious customs, social usages such as weddings, funnerals, and other rites, charity to religious mendicants, there being 500,000 such beggars. And those who lord it over our faith in spite of their talk of eternal verities never refuse to take the last anna from a starving family to add to their already large hoard or perhaps enable them to live in luxury and dissipation. Our rural indebtedness amounts to one-fifth of the total value of land, live-stock, implements etc., and yet under religious conventions where mammon rules and not piety, the villager is expected to pay, pay and pay again. Customs, traditions, superstition all demand money.

Between them they represent a liquid fortune which could buy all the millionaires put together.

' Yes, yes," replied Gangoo, "but that is neither here nor there. This socio-religious reform is neither your business nor mine. Hadn't we better retire for the night ?"

I reminded Gangoo that he had promised to give me an account of his early life. He was silent for a spell, as if making ap his mind where to begin, and then remarked ;

" It can only be in brief, you know."

" That is just how I want it," said I. He began his story.

## The Story.

" I was born, nay, even conceived, with a blight. My father, a poor farmer of Naroli, a village in the Kangra District, died a few days after my conception, and my mother breathed her last the moment I saw the light of day. So I was an orphan even when I was a few minutes old. Through the courtesy of a neighbour woman whose husband was a Havildar in the army I found a new home. She found a wet nurse for me and brought me up as her own child.

"When I was three years old, I lost my first benefactor, who died uuder the spell of black magic. The Havildar having come home on furlough, returned to his battalion with a new bride and with me too as an encumbrance that he wished to get rid of in vain, for everybody sought to avoid me as one would avoid plague. I am told I wes a winsome child, and succeeded in winning the Havildar over. The new bride was plain aud I was lovely. Whether loveliness excites love and ugliness repels it. I cannot say. But somehow it happened to our case that the Havildar s love for me increased as my looks improved with my years, and his repulsion for his wife too increased prportionately. She attributed it to me, and made one or two attempts to strangle me but the Havildar came to my

resue each time, and her attempts were frustrated. She gave me a very rough handling anyway, pounding me almost to a pup. I have a vague recollection of her plugging my nostrils, and then pinching my nose and slapping my cheeks till they were the colour of wine. She used the rod with such vigour as almost to break the bones of my hands. Her cruel tortures would have been enough to kill a rich man's child. But I was born and lived in the grip of penury, hence all she could do was to roughen my skin, till her cuts only tingled me, and filled my heart with something of a thrill.

"I missed her blows even more than the Havildar's kisses. What I did mind most was the soldiers' unwelcome attentions. They were revolting. It was cruel for them to treat me as they did I hated them for it, but they could persuade me always by their gifts of sweets and occeasional tips. I was then ten years old, and must have looked superb.

One day as I was loitering about the Sadar Bazar where a soldier had taken me for a treat and left me after the treat. I was accosted by a well-dressed gentleman. He was very polite and very agreeable. He asked if I had ever been to the picture. I confessed I had not.

"Then yon have missed the treat of your life. It is a sight for the gods."

"My curiosity was aroused. I said I had not been to any school other than the regimental school, and since I had seen very few books. I was afraid I could not understand how such a simple thing as a picture could be a sight for such high personages as the gods. He laughed loud and long. He said he meant the film, the cinema. He asked if I had time to go with him to Peshawar City. He would show me one of the films now on.

"Tingling with curiosity. I showed my willingness to go with him. There were no talkies then The pictures were silent, but they were far better than the

talkies of to-day. They had a touch of Nature about them. I was simply charmed. Aft r I had done with my evening's entertainment, he brought me home and leaving me outside my door disappeared, promising to call again and take me to the pictures. We were to meet in the Sadar Bazar. This evening's entertainment gave me some occupation which I must confess was to my taste. So I did not miss a show and he entertained me in diverse ways, be it said to his credit. never molesting me or giving me a grievance. I could see he loved me, but his love did not then appear to me to be selfish. I did not then know the scoundrel that he really was.

" One day he proposed that I should become an actor. I was pretty enough to take on myself the role of a heroine, he said. That would be something delightful. I agreed to follow him to the ends of the earth if he could help me to get that role.

" He bade me come to Lahore. The Havildar was ill in the hospital. He had an accident. My life at home was a purgatory. I accepted his offer and like a cad. I deserted the Havildar who was perhaps on his death-bed—he died subsequently. I later learnt. We came to Lahore. My guide said we would have to go overseas to the New World. My salary would be fabulous. He could not make me realise how much a month I would be earning. A cart-land of rupees and gold coins would be my weekly wages. He would send my photograph on, but he wasn't sure they would engage me without seeing my angelic beauty. Just one glance would be enough.

" But how can we go overseas without money?" I queried.

" That is the point, my boy. How can we go overseas without money ?" he repeated. " And money you know begets money in heaps Would you believe me, my boy, if I tell you, you could have money for the asking."

" Can I ?" I asked with a note of suspicion.

"If you seriously see yourself to make it. The trouble is perhaps you are not serious."

"I assured him I was very serious.'

"My good boy, nothing is disgraceful, if it ends in bringing us gold and taking us across the seas."

"I admitted that he was right,"

"Then join hands with me, and do as I bid you"

"You will find me agreeable to any of your propositions."

"He got me to join a gang of ruffians whose aims and objects I am ashamed to discuss with you, Doctor, for they represent nothing but barefaced villainy of the worst type.'

"I bade him make a clean breast of it all, and he proceeded with his story as follows :—

"The man who had thus led me astray was no other than the notorious gaol-bird Nusroo. He had an organisation of his own whose many-sided activities brought him in plenty of money. He had a ring of beggars and crooks. Some of these posed as blind Brahmins. They were no more blind than you or I. Nusroo, the ring-leader, had invented some pastes which applied to the eyes shut them effectively for eight hours. During the morning on festival days these blind beggars would go to the Hindu *mohallas* posing as Brahmins and brought in alms each to the value of five or six rupees, of which half was theirs, and half went to the ring-leader. The provsions they brought were turned into cash.

"The blind beggars were cat burglars at night, and posed as blind men during the day. The ring-leader received the stolen goods and disposed them of through sub-agents all over the country. They called the booty 'dat.' What was found at Lahore was disposed of at Calcutta. The cat burgular defied detection for who would suspect a blind man of cat burglary ? If a cat burglar of the type were given a dose of the cat and shed tears profusely, he wonld

open his eyes forthwith. But none was in the secret, so the cat burglars escaped.

There were dens, where crooks assembled to discuss their plans. There were gambling booths conducted by Nusroo. There were night clubs, where all sorts of roughs assembled to discuss the ways and means of carrying out a daring robbery. There were pickpockets' meeting houses. There were brothels run by him And the worst of it was these very rogues who thought nothing of shedding human blood posed as *beggars, sains, sadhus, sants,* and keepers of our faith. Some priests were in his pay, because they were his informers. They informed him as to where a pretty girl inclined to be fast could be found for love or money, and which people were rich enough to be worthy of a visit by anyone of his cat burglars.

"Now he wanted to add a new department, One of the fraternity was running a girls' school. He had engaged a number of pretty girls whom he gave receipt-books to go to rich men's houses and induce them to patronise their girls' school by liberally subscribing towards their funds. They kept half the collection and the rest went to Nusroo who helped run the school. Another girls' schoul run by some scoundrels received a substantial grant simply for providing pretty girls to be supplied to scoundrels out of whom Nusroo was able to extract money. He was now in need of a boy who would do the collection, from rich folk. I was to be that boy. I was to have no scruples, if I cared to collect money.

"Your father was known to be an easy-going man. He was a rich man. I was sent to fleece him. It so happened he took a fancy to me, and made me drop those scoundrels. It was a tough job taking me out of this vicious circle, but he was a very resourceful man. and saved me from their clutches at last, by paying Nusroo for my release."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Second Night

I thought Gangoo felt a bit fagged and frizzled.

"Fed up with it already?" was my comment.

"Not a bit of it'! he replied.

"How did you pass the day?" I asked.

"Dull as water" was his reply.

"Any audience?"

"Yes, a few old folk and . . . and one or two maidens . . . ahem . . . rather pleasing to look at."

"I wonder what attracts them."

"The recitations, and the atmosphere of piety."

"Not the yarns you spin for them?"

"Well, may be those, too, I gave them one that must have gone home. There was chucking and a murmur of delight."

"That sounds interesting."

"I'll tell you the story."

### The Story

Once there was a wayfarer. He was benighted in thick forest. He did not know his way about, so he decided to go up a huge *peepal* tree to be out of the reach of wild beasts of which there is no dearth in Indian forests. They prowl about at night in search of something to eat, and an unarmed traveller who has missed his way into their haunts is a godsend. So our wayfarer shuddering at the prospect of meeting a wild animal climbed on to the highest branch of the tree and composed himself to sleep. He was not a bit sleepy, at first, but then since he was quite exhausted, Nature had its way. When he woke up the sun was well up. He thought it was time he started on his journey and raising himself from the reclining posture he cast his look down to

make a descent, when he was horrified to behold a big Bengal man eater with its mouth agape, waiting at the foot of the trunk literally to make morsel of him. He was as it were paralysed and transfixid to the branch on which he sat. But by and by he recovered himself a little, and looking around observed that near his perch was a huge serpent, with its head dangling down and coming closer and closer to his own. He was chilled with fright at this double danger, but remained motionless in the face of cruel death, that awaited him, expecting every moment to be his last. Even as he sat dazed and desperate, he noticed in tne upper branches a honeycomb from which came ticking down sweet drops of honey. He uncociously shifted his head and held out his tongue to receive these. In this delicious enjoyment be thought no more of the awful dangers that surrounded him!

"This was the story."

"How did it end?"

"It ended in a sermon. I reminded them that they were all wayfarers of the long and tendious journey of life and were in no better plight than the trav‹ller in the story. In their lustful enjoyment of worldliness, they had forgotten the double danger of death and incarceration in ehe infernal regions that awaited them."

"Let us leave it at that. Now how about your life-story?" I suggested.

He mumbled sonmething, and after a pause began his story as follows:

"Your father was an angel. He fed me and clad me like a rich man's son. 'You look superb, my boy, in your Sunday suit,' he used to say. He preferred to see me in my Sunday suit, always, your mother did not like me at all. But your father was a strong man. He was overbearing. He was domineering. I am afraid he was not good to your mother. That was the only defect in an otherwise perfect man that your father was. I tried to remonstrate with him one day when I saw your

mother in tears. He told me he could not help loving me as he did. He was prepared to keep her in comfor and treat her as wife, if she only left hime alone in his weakness. He told her that it would kill him if he gave me up. But your mother was adamant. She thought it was unnatural. He could forget me if he tried If I was about he wouldn't make the attempt. Hence she would have me instantly removed. But your father would not hear of it. One day your mother was seated in the street outside her house. Your father and I were upstairs in the drawing room. We were certainly not in a compromising position, but it did look suspicious, a young man seated beside a pretty boy, both reclining against the same cushion. Your mother inadvertently sent on to us a caller, a doctor friend of your father. He surprised us as we sat like that.

"Your father was greatly embarrassed. He could not satisfactorily explain to his colleague who I was, why his wife was not beside him, and instead he was having a tete-a-tete with me, a pretty boy. When his friend left, your father was so infuriated that he maltreated your mother, and they subsequently parted. This gave him great licence.

"He began to spend money on me more liberally than before. He sent me to a *maulvi*, to enable me pick up the three R's. This *maulvi*, who was a tailor by profession, did not know anything beyond making me repeat things like a parrot, and when I failed to reproduce them in their proper order, he would chastise me most heartlessly. He kept me upside down as a cock in the public street for almost an hour. My back was loaded heavily, and before he l t me off, he used the rod rather cruelly.

"I grew up as a masochist, as one who revelled in being chastised openly and humiliated before the public. He started slapping my cheeks and intended that he wculd stop when I would put my hands up to resist, but I let him fire away. He did not stop, till he was tired, but that left clots on my cheeks, which would naturally be noticed. He had a customer, whe saw him do it.

"'You treat this boy most shamefully,' he said.

"'I can't help it,, said the tailor. "It is the blows that make the donkey go.'

"The gentleman apparently concurred and said he wanted to be accommodated to the extent of taking me home to persuade his son to come along, and study with me. Of course the tailor was only too glad. The gentleman took me home, and who do you think I saw there ? No son of his at all, but your own mother. She burst into tears when she saw me. She said she was very sorry indeed ; she had thought I was antagonistic. but she could see I was not, for I too was a victim of your father's tyranny. She had heard of the way the tailor treated me, and she was sure it was at her husband's instigation. She wanted to make a common cause with me. She did not know I had absolutely nothing to complain of. But I was sympathetic. One cannot but have a wave of pity for the poor wife, whose husband is afflicted with some sort of a sexual deviation. She wanted me to call occasionally, and let her know how I was getting on.

"I was now a grown-up youth. I was being fed on dainties, and I had a lot of smutty talk from your father's own lips. The result was I did feel like having a mate. I told your father so, although in a roundabout way. I kept dinning into his ears that he should call home his wife. He said she would again kick up trouble. I vouchsafed for the fact, she wouldn't. I told him, with a wife at home his relations with me would not be noticed ; without her we both were in the public eye.

"He allowed me to negotiate with your mother, and I was instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation and happy union between them. But over-sexed as I was, I contracted from the tailor a certain vice, now so common among our youths, a very baneful practice. It is the wreck of many a young man's life. It eats into our vitals, and like tuberculosis consumes our life-blood. It is contracted

through unscrupulous teachers and evil associates. No sensible guardian will ever let his boy go to a teacher's house, not let him mix with wicked boys. Do you know, Doctor, how it may be remedied?"

"It is easily remedied. Let the boy's genitals be daily washed with tepied water and some good soap. Let no white pasty substance be allowed to deposit in the pit of the glans, round the forepart. The substance causes irritation which is a temptation to self-abuse. Let there be no rectal worms. They too cause irritation, for the *anus* too is a centre of sexual pleasure. Let the child pass free motion. Let there be no constipation. Let no sour things, or condiments, or other stimulating food such as eggs, and fish, and meat enter into their diet. Let there be as little vulgarity in the house as possible."

"Sensible advice. But your father never wasted words on me. He examined my under-garments every now and then, and if he found I smelt abominably, or there was a stiff spot or any trace of a seminal discharge on my bed clothes, he gave me the thrashing of my life. He gave me a hot bath, washing my genitals in water and boric acid. He would then rub me all over, and apply some oily ointment which caused a pricking sensation on my skin. He used some salt to relieve me of my constipation.

"When the age of puberty has been reached, or, so to speak when one is fast approaching manhood one does need to be mated. We in this country cannot afford to mate out of caste. There is the fear of ostracism. None will marry into poverty. The girl's parents seek a boy who can support their daughter. The boy's parents seek a girl who will bring a rich dowry. And virility, or beauty in one isn't any consideration to the other. Then there is character. In some cases it too counts a little. But if both character and caste are a barrier, one need not make his plans for a wedding. He dies a bachelor.

"Just think of a man like myself, who is over-sexed and has both these disqualifications. What can be his lot? He turns a scoundrel, of course. But if he has a man like your father to back him up, his scoundrelism is interpreted as so much utility in life. You will wonder how villainy can be taken to mean utility. It is accursed. The following details of my earlier life will explain the whole thing. I may, however, point out that I do not want you to impute motives of vulgarity to what is a statement of facts with which every domestic servant endowed with virility and looks is familiar. The Doctor knew there could be no wedding for me. He knew there could be no children to some of his lady patients. Their husbands virility was in fault. If I was made so to arrange things that one could conceive a child, and gratify her longing for motherhood, and her husband's longing for someone to play with and live for, so that his family line should not abruptly terminate with him, wouldn't I be a benefactor of that family? The social convention that can allow an unfit husband to fall to the lot of an over-sexed wife has no right to complain of a laxity of morals among women so placed.

"In our neighbourhood was a rich banker. His name as far as I can remember was Bhore Lal. This Bhore Lal had so recklessly exhausted his vitality in his youth, that even at thirty be found himself verging on sexual bankruptcy. He had a very pretty wife. You know, Doctor, all these rich folk somehow contrive to wed pretty girls, and pretty girls are often over-sexed. Santosh was. You can imagine the lot of the poor girl when she came to know of her husband's affliction, She was told he could be rejuvenated. But this business of rejuvenation which every Vaid, and Doctor, and Hakeem, and Quack has made his speciality is really speaking almost an impossible achievement. Bhore Lal had spent a lot of money to get himself healed, but his

case far from healing had actually got worse. Santosh had been a frequent visitor to your father's. She spoke to him about it. He said he would like to see Bhore Lal. He examined him carefully and gave him a prescription. He did not tell him what the trouble was and how long, if at all, it would take to heal.

"She called again next morning. It was noon and none of the other patients was expected. So we three were closeted together. The Doctor told her it was a hopeless case, and bluntly asked her what she wanted. She said she wanted a child. Could she get one from a home or from an erring mother? Your father said he was not sure. There might be complications. He told her he had a suggestion to make. Why not let things drift in a natural way. She did not seem to understand. He bade her take me home as a domestic, and all would be well. All was well. I need not enter into details. In three years' time she had two sons, and lovely children they were, to be sure. Then Bhore Lal died, and I had to come away, for widows are not expected to live in style.

## CHAPTER XIX

### Third Night

Gangoo was in a tell-tale mood. He said he had had a death-hed confession made to him by a *sanyasi*. Since it was a paralled case to ours he had made up his mind inspite of his oath to take me into his confidence.

But when he came to telling the tale he was filled with a sort of superstitious dread. It was all I could to shake off his fears, and he was brought round at last to relate the most sensational story which I here reproduce in Gangoo's own words:

### The Mystery of Sanyasi

As I was on my way out to my haunt this morning, a very old, ugly, wiry woman touched my feet, and most humbly requested me to accompany her to her house to attend to a person who was on his death-bed,

and was anxious to share the secrets of his life with another *sanyasi* of the *parmhans* cult. Now no *sanyasi* will say no to such a simple request as that It is as it were against professional etiquete. Besides, these *sanyasis* during the course of their wanderings hit upon either some treasure trove, or which is even more precious, a herb with an instantaneoos healing power, the secret of which they guard with their lives, and share with another *sanyasi* only when life is just flickering out. I felt elated thinking I couldn't be in better luck and hastened to follow the woman to her house. She led me through a blind alley and stopped only when there wasn't any further to go, the passage being blocked by an old dilapidated house in dingy surrounding. It was into this house that we made our way, first through a dark and dreary passage much too narrow for us to walk side by side, and then into a squalid room which was dimly lighted by a small skylight. But for a miserable bed that sagged and dropped, a newly purchased mat, and an earthen jar full of water, the room was practically bare. On the mat was huddled up the *sanyasi* who with his sallow complexion, hollow cheek, a pug nose, and a haggard wild expression inspired me with the terror of a hobgoblin. When he saw me approach him with a trepidation, he opened his small slits of eyes a trifle wider, as if suspecting the genuineness of my claim to being a continent *parmhans*. This made me go up to him bold as brass and bawling out the name of divinity as loud as my lungs allowed. I knelt down beside him, and invoked the blessings of Shivji or Vishnu on him almost in one breath, so that whichever his cult he should feel reassured I took his hand in mine and read the *Gayatri mantra* to ease his pain, for it struck me, although he professed to be a *sanyasi*, he was not having a peaceful end, as all *sanyasis* are won't to have. He seemed to writhe and wriggle as if in terrible anguish.

When I felt I had made an impression on him by

feigning to shower on his dying hand the blessings of all the gods whose names I could recall, I gave the necessary oath to guard any secret he wanted to leave into this world with my life. Then judiciously reminding him that Heaven awaited him only if he unburdened his soul to a brother *sanyasi* like myself, I began to probe into the mystery of his life which he unfolded to me step by step. My ! how it made my hair stand on end !

Here Gangoo. perhaps terrorised by superstition, refused to be drawn out. When reminded that it was yet too early to turn in, he agreed to continue the story of his own life. Pray proceed.

I had to be admitted once more to your father's home. But I did not stay there long. Professor Balkishen came over to fetch me. He was suffering from chronic constipation. Your father examined him and pronounced that he had had a wasting disease much too long to be easily cured. He wanted him to have his blood tested. The professor submitted a report. He had in his blood certain poisons which indicated that having had illicit relations with someone suffering from syphilis, and someone else suffering from gonorrhoea, he had been infected by the diseases which were then in a suppressed state in his blood—I mean the germs. The treatment would take a very long time, and your father wasn't sure if he could be cured. He wanted to know, however, if the wife too was similarly afflicted. The man said on oath he had not been near his wife, and that was what had driven him to the Doctor. She had her sex tide at an ebb. She betrayed it by a hundred and one subtle signs. Afflicted as he was, he could not respond, for fear she too should be infected. She had confessed to him her yearning for motherhood. He had sympathised with her. but being a sensible man he did not like to bring forth infected children. That morning he had accidentally discovered her in tears on her solitary pillow, and had therefore hastened to your

father to place the whole situation before him and get his advice.

Your father forbade him the act. He would meanwhile like to see the report of her blood test. This was brought the next day. The wife too came. She was a delicate creature, very innocent looking. Your father explained to her the whole situation, and after being closeted with her for half an hour, brought her out with her face beaming with a smile.

She came again, and again and so did ner husband, and finally the professor's case being pronounced incurable, even though he was not an acute sufferer, and the infection in him was only dormant. I was taken away by them to take charge of the wife's brother who was staying with them, and who had become a bad boy. I knew what was expected of me.

The boy was a handsome child. He was ten years old, I suppose, and had been sent to the professor by his parents who lived in a village. The object was that he should receive the best of education. We in this country send a boy to school for his education, and think that is all there is to it. We cease to worry about him. We do not know that most schools are incubating establishments for self-abuse and home sexuality. No pretty boys are safe. The professor's brother-in-law, Manohar was so thick in the game he soon began to be noticed by his sister. The silly boy was afflicted with the evil practice of self-abuse. The result was that his looks began to fade. He had dark rings round his eyes and he had a stiff mark left on his underwear. I pointed it out to his sister and asked her advice. She said she did not know what to do. She dared not send the boy back home. Her father who was a great landlord might take offence. If the boy was not cured of those evil habits and did not improve in his studies, she would be blamed. She was prepared to spend anything on him, provided that he was cured. I asked her why she did not engage a tutor for him.

She said she had tried one, but he had only aggravated the situation. I asked if she would mind if I gave the boy a taste of the cat. She said she would be glad if I did for she supposed it was the only thing that could cur him. I gave it him with a vengeance. not once butemany times and my tortures were terrible. But it wasn't anv use. The boy became even more secretive. At your father's suggestion we took him to Pahlgaum for a change of scenes. I took upon myself the role of a lover of the boy and we had sex talks. He was an ignorant fool. I explained to him almost everything I told him that a single ejaculation cuts his life short by a year. It seemed that I had over-shot the mark. He confessed he had had something like a thousand ejaculations and wondered if he could have lived to be a thousand if he hadn't. Even the ascetics, who practised continence as a doctrine of their faith did not live so long as that.

"A wily kid," said I. 'You should have told him the white fluid that passes out in one ejaculation contains sperm enough to generate a quarter of the population of the whole word. If he wasted it, he, in a way, killed as many babies at a stroke."

Gangoo continued:

I succeeded in bringing home to home the preciousness of this wonderful fluid, of the ravashing delight it affords if rightly used, of the deliciousness of the act if effected in the fullest vigour of youth, of the pleasure and enjoyments of life if mated with a lovely wife He was evidently impressed. Such talk did not excite him. He was entirely changed. When he found that sex was not tabooed, he taked freely and his movements ceased to be furtive. By and by he became strong enough to resist all temptations

At Lahore he was admitted to a private reformatory and was soon working like a good boy.

I stayed with this family fcr four years and then had to leave them. There was a little one whom they would not let me play with.

## CHAPTER XX

### Fourth Night

Your father's reputation as an expert in the treatment of venereal diseases spread far and wide. He was also known as a gynaecologist, so that he had lady visitors coming to him in swarms. One day an old lady paid us a visit. She had with her a youth who seemed to be the last word on idiocy. He was born infirm. The nerves that control sexuality seemed to be missing. His was a hopeless case and your father told the woman who was his mother that he was born so, and no drug had yet been invented that could cure him. She said she was a very rich woman. She could spend a hundred thousand rupees on him if need be. Could not the doctor try his skill on her boy who was fatherless? Your father was persuaded to try his skill on him although he knew it was no use.

For six months he had his drugs. They could not and therefore did not cure him. Then the youth disappeared from our lives. Six more months passed, and then one day the old lady brougth a girl of surpassing loveliness. The old woman's grievance was that her son who thanks to a *sanyasi* had been healed had wedded that girl, but being dazzled by her beauty, could not go near her. Could I prescribe something to cool the girl's ardour? She was evidently oversexed.

"You want her to be frigid?" asked your father.

"That is just what I want," said the lady.

"Don't you think," he asked, "that will be detrimental to your son's interests?"

"How do you mean?" she queried.

"It will cut off his line, and then the property will pass on to his collaterals!"

She moaned audibly,

"Then what am I to do?" she asked. "You couldn't cure my boy."

"How big is your estate?" your father questioned.

"Three hundred thousand rupeeps a year."

"Have you an estate-mannager?"

"My son manages it."

"Take Gangoo home as manager. He will see that your son's interests do not suffer in any way."

I held this position for close on twelve years, and it was a fine job. The woman was a skinflint. The lad was stupid. He was at first antagonistic but when his first child came, a very pretty boy, he devoted himself to the service of the infant, and left me alone.

He had three more sons, the youngest being much too fond of me. This the father could not tolerate. It seems he was jealous. So I had to retire.

Things got talked about and your father did not think it was right I should continue. I was now growing in years, and your father said I should have a steady job that did not put an undue strain on my nerves.

Lala Sadanand had a sick wife, and he used to come with her to your father. He was thirty, but had no children, for his wife was consumptive and suffering from a fell disease. I was to be the manager to his business. Your father had instructed me not to indulge in anything undesirable. So I was very cautious and posed as a pious and austere man.

"Was that *sanyasi* of yesterday's too, very pious and austere?"

"Far from it, he was the worst scoundrel ever born, and yet he posed as a holy man."

"I bet you a tenner you cannot bring out that he was a scoundrel. He wasn't No *sanyasi* ever is—unless like you he too has an axe to grind, a very pretty maiden in the case who has cleverly given him the slip and who must be traced at any expense."

" It was just the case with Raghu, too," said Gangoo. " He was no more a *sanyasi* than I am one. He was a very rich priest."

" What makes you think he was a scoundrel ? " I asked.

" His life-story betrayed him," he said to me.

" Holy man ! Which cult is thine ?"

" And thine ?" I queried.

" I am a worshipper of Sakti, and a true devotee of Siva."

" The same here," was my ready rejoinder.

" So we are brothers of the same cult. I am so glad I have met you, friend. My sins will now be readily absolved. I die contented."

" Bear up, my good man. How knowest thou that the death approacheth. Dost thou not have faith in the mercy of the Maker ?"

" Bah !" he sneered. " A sinner like myself deserves no mercy, expects none." The forces of hell that had been let loose in him were slowly dispelled and he continued, " Seest thou not that my prayer hath been heard. Bhagwan hath sent me a confessor to soothe my dying hour. Something within me keeps whispering over and over again that I should make a clean breast of it all. Wilt thou listen, brother to the woes of a soul that might otherwise never be redeemed ? If thou wilt, then my soul shall depart in peace. And if."

" Have no fear on that score my holy brother. The Hand that directed the course of thy life knew what was best in thy case. A free and frank avowal and thy mission is over. If depart thou must, then why delay. Thy holy confessor consecrated by all the gods in Heaven, tracing his descent from Brahma Himself, awaits in the name of all that is holy to hear thy confession, and grant thee an absolution." He broke forth.

**A terrible Cenfession.**

" I confess ! I confess !! I confess !!!

" Listen ! Listen !! Listen !!!

"My name is Raghu. I an't a *sanyasi*. I am a priest of Serampore. My father was one of Tanjor.

"Even as a child I was brought up in the lap of luxury. We temple priests are the favoured ones of the gods. They grant us all that is best in life, the reverence of a credulous people. We succeed in imposing upon them to an enormous extent. We might not be the gods, but who can deny we are the only deputies of the gods on earth. They dare not offend the gods. If they do, they do so unknowingly. Who would purposely dare displease the diety? It certainly is an error of omission or of commission; and offen one over which none has any control. Yet it is a sin all the same, and a sin may be visited on a person in the shape of a scourge which is even worse than death Absolution from son is sought still more assiduously, owing to the universal belief that the gods are much too irritable to overlook the slightest offence, and much to relentless to pass over our shortcomings with a mere warning gesture. They are stern, heartless, cruel, crushing, and unless we are in league with their deputies we have no redress. It is the deputies alone who know how to propitiate them. None knows what interpretation is going to be put upon the most innocuous acts of his daily routine. This interpretation is the province of a priest, and we know how to make the most of this privilege. The poor, superstitious, ignorant, illiterate, custom and tradition ridden worshipper reverently donates his anna to his favourite shrine. Do you know at what expense? His wife or child is down with malaria. A single dose of quinine might save her or his life. His daily savings amount to no more than an anna. We gave him the impression that no medicine can availe. unless first the gods are propitiated. I take it in ninety. nine cases out of a hundred the gods receive his anna depriving him of the wherewithal to buy medicine that might be the saving of his dear one's life without granting the reprieve. His dear one dies in spite of the gods.

This we attribute to *karma*, some evil deeds of his in a previous incarnariou being visited on him in this. No wonder they are all stoics. A paltry anna, I admit, even though it has cost a poor wretch his life is but a mere pittance for the high and mighty priest. But it represents the very essence of religion to the wretch. Religion you know, is nothing if it is not the sum total of the personal sacrifices of its adherents. And they are no mean sacrifices either. Drop by drop they accumulate. In our temple alone they added up into many thousand rupees a month. They soar up to lakhs in those of some consequence. Benares has a hundred thousand pilgrims coming in and going out every day. Over and above that we have crores of rupees worth of property attached to our holy places, over which we hold undisputed sway. So you see we are rich beyond the dreams of avarice. And it is well that we are so, for we are the brain of the nation, carrying on spiritual and philosophic research. But for us every Indian would cease to be a born philosopher. It is this research and our proximity to the gods that has made us impeccable, but I am sorry to own it is this very power of the pelf and this impeccability that has led to some of the most heinous crimes being committed by the black sheep among us. Mine is a case in point."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### Fifth Night.

Unlike his pretty wife Sadanand was over sexed. The wife was a delicate woman. Her consumption and subsequent death might easily be laid at his door. Many an Indian husband is like Sadanand. He refuses to be guided hy his wife's sex tide, and ruthlessly murders her by his attentions.

Her death chastens him for a spell, the grief subduing his sexuality, but for spell only. Then his suppressed lustfulness works itself up at fever heat, so that he can no longer hold himself in and seeks satis-

faction elsewhere, but on the sly. He has to have a tout to arrange it for him. I was that tout Sadanand wanted a maiden, or a widow, a polished girl whom if he could he should subseqnently wed. He would have absolutely nothing to do with a prostitute.

Now runing after maidens or widows, seeking to persuade them for love or money, to go to a stranger's house even on the prospect of a subsequent wedding was in those times considered to he a wild-goose chase. I went to a young musician's place, instead. She lived in the Anarkali Bazar and had the reputation of being a fast woman. Her name was Leela.

Leela took a fancy to me at first sight. She took a fancy to my master too at first sight. Perhaps, I was handsomer than my master, and may be also more virile. But I was a servant, and my master was a rich man rolling in wealth. So it wasn't to be wondered at, she had her love bestowed on him for preference. Sadanand was given to understand Leela was a chaste girl. He told me Leela was so beautiful she simply took his breath away. She urged that I should arrange to get them wedded. I did not like the idea of the girl's entirely passing out of my hands. So I kept on postponing the ceremony ; till being quite fed up, and his impatience passing all bounds he proposed to her himself. It seems that the girl too was fond of him, enough to be prepared to wed him. But she did not like to sail under false colours. She owned it to him that she wasn't a society girl at all, but was a prostitute.

This led to a breach between them, for Sadanand could not brook the idea of associating with such a woman. He was estranged with me too but he did not dismiss me. Her beauty has a spell of its own which makes one swallow one's scruples. He was so obsessed by her loveliness that he dreamed of her, and was uneasy now that she was gone. He missed her so terribly that he neither ate nor drank for a week.

Then I approached him and told him to take Leela to the Ganges, go through all manner of rites and cere-

monies over her to expiate her sins, and then wed her. This idea seemed to appeal to him. So the three of us went to Hardwar, and they went through certain rites, feeding the Brahmins and the like, and he thought Leela was now chastened and fit to be his wife. He consulted the Brahmins, but they were not quite satisfied. They put off the matter another mouth, saying the stars were not yet in the ascendant, and the opportune moment for the nuptials had not yet arrived.

It seems that it was never to arrive, for Sadanand had an attack of cholera and died.

Leela and I had nothing for it but to bide our time, It was for well over two years we lived there, posing as a *sadha* and she attending recitations of some learned Pandits. It seems she was really fed up with her past life, and did not want to return to it. We were not married, but like an indiscreet fool I pastered her, and the consequence was that she was in the family way. In due course she was delivered of a daughter whom I named Sheela On the fourthday of this child's birth when she was to have her fourth day bath in the Ganges, we set out for a bath. I held Sheela in my arms, and she took off her clothes. The *ghat* was crowded and I missed her. When next I saw her, she was being carried away by the current. We sought to rescue her, but she went under. She did not know how to swim, so I thought she must have been drowned.

The whole day I had that crying baby in my arms. I had no money to buy her milk, and a wet nurse was therefore out of the question, A Seth of Amritsar who was there with his wife and who by the way was childless took pity on us and adopted her. He also took me into his employ.

Sheela grew up to be the image of her mother. She was wedded to a banker at Lahore, whose first wife had died only a short time before. Her old mother-in-law gave her no peace. As ill-luck would have it, her husband died. For her it was the end of things. For six months she lived the life of the damned. Then she had a

serious attack of something and must have been cremated had you not come to her rescue.

"The story of her disappearance is already known to you.

"But you did not finish the story of Raghu the priest."

"We shall let Raghu speak for himself.

"When I was ten we had visitors from Dera Ghazi Khan. They were a husband and his youug wife, and a pretty little child, their daughter. I can very well remember the young wife. She was soft eyed, lovely and with the envied curves of youth, and skin like milk and roses. We had, attached to the temple as outhouses, recently built quarters which we used as a guest-house. It was here that this North-Western Frontier family was lodged for the night. The guest-house was situated on the side away from the town, an isolated wing, standing all by itself on a strip of a land where vegetation had been allowed to run wild. With the exception of the two rooms occupied by the visitors the entire wing was untenanted. The two rooms had been thoroughly cleaned by the temple menial before their occupation. The other rooms which were locked had remained intact. The pilgrims were provided with straw mats to sleep on. There were no bedsteads available then. The pilgrims found their own beds.

"It was late when the pilgrims retired from the night. They slept inside the room locking it from within, inspite of the heat, presumably because the wife was loaded with gold and jewels. At eleven next morning the door was still unopened, and frantic cries of the baby were heard. We broke the door open, and found the husband quite dead of a cobra bite. The wife too had been bitten, but hers was perhaps a second bite, for life was not yet extinct. The child was intaet.

"Attempts were made by a matron among the *dev dasies* to resuscitate tbe woman. She came too, for a

spell, during which time the matron succeeded in getting her formally to dedicate the child to the service of the temple as a *devi dasi*, or a slave of the gods ; and then she too died.

"This was how Harivansho was first iutroduced into out temple at Tanjor."

## CHAPTER XXII

### Sixth Night

Gangoo seemed to have something up his sleeve.

"My good Doctor," he began, "you do look bored, having to stay indoors all the time.

"Well, yes, in a way," I agreed, "although I too had an outing, and was very nearly in sight of an adventure."

"That sounds interesting," said Gangoo. "Let us hear the story."

"It isn't much of a story," I responded, "You remember I told you I was bored stiff. I went out immediately after you left. As I passed before that temple yonder, I met rather a pretty girl witn no locks. Her hair was cropped short."

"Must be a widow ?"

"She was dressed in *khadi* and must have been a bit off colour. She did look flurried and flustered, and was hastening away from the temple. I dogged her footsteps. She turned a corner and stopped outside a small house. As I just came up with her, she was joined by another girl rather taller than she, and when I stole a glance at this other girl, you may imagine my amazement to see the very girl who had drugged us to sleep and kidnapped our Sheela.

"I turned round and our eyes met. There wasn't a trace of guilt in those bright eyes. She looked me fair and square in the eyes. I began to talk with her.

"Excuse me." I began. "Did you come from Lahore ?"

"I came from Bombay," said she in a resonant voice.

"Did you see hereabout a girl from Lahore called Sheela ?"

"I am not sure what you mean by asking this question. I know a girl Sheela by name, who came from Agra. She is the Station Master's wife."

"I mean the one who was here a week ago."

"I don't," she snapped, and turned on her heels.

I let her proceed a little way and then decided to trace her footsteps. She melted into the crowd that had gathered, and I could see no sign of her. Only the widow was lolloping back as if she had an accident. I overtook the widow and stopped her. She burst into tears. I asked her where her companions was. She cried as if her heart would break.

I worked my way into her feelings calling her 'my sister,' and coaxed her into making a confession.

"I don't know," she sobbed.

"But you must have somewhere to go ?"

"I was in the temple yonder. But I have escaped from the monk who... .........I should prefer to die rather than go back to him."

"You need not worry," said I. "I shall fix you up all right. But can't you tell me who that other woman was ?"

"I don't know her name, but she is the noblest creature I have ever come across."

"Why has she deserted you like that ?"

"She has been called away by her duty to her *Guru Dev*. She will be busy for a week. After that she will call for me, and conduct me to her *Guru Dev* where she says I shall be able to find a sanctuary.

"Where is she going to meet you next ?"

"Near the tank, off the temple of Bhim Goda."

"And where are you going to put up, meanwhile ?"

"I don't know."

"I have fixed her up in the house of the *halvai* we go to for our supply of milk. She will stay with his wife."

Gangoo did not seem to like the idea.

"You haven't done the right thing by that girl. The wicked monk will miss her, and soon a search will be afoot. The *halvai* is a devoted worshipper at the temple. He will give her up to the monk. I'll tell you what we shall do. I had a very pretty widow at my place. She came with her mother. She told me where she lives. It is somewhere near the other end. This monk has no jurisdiction that side. Let us take this girl to them. They will keep her with them for a week, I can vouch for that."

The long and short of the matter was that the girl was conducted to the widow and her mother's house. Gangoo told her that she was my sister, and I was a doctor of Delhi. She would stay with them for a week. They had not the least objection. The mother informed us that the monk in question was a real scoundrel. Evidently she had a grievance against him. So our young widow was safe with her.

We next visited the house whence that pretty temptress who had enticed our Sheela away had emerged. The house was deserted. One of the neighbours informed us that it was haunted, so nobody cared to put up there for the night. It had been set apart by a Sindhi Seth for the visitors to lodge during their temporary stay at Hardwar. Some came during the daytime, but none was known to enter it by night, There was no care-taker.

Yes, a pretty girl of the description did come there off and on. In fact, she was there that very morning, and she was the picture of piety. The ghosts do not molest such as she.

That night before we turned in, Gangoo reproduced a part of Raghu's confession as follows :—

This little child whose name was Harivansho was admitted to a devotee's home, and since she was the chosen of the gods, every honour was paid to her even as a child. She was made much of, and her beauty and form were duly cultured so as to make her fit for the position to which she would one day be called. She was possessed of natural gifts, an elegant form, chiselled features, hazel eyes, golden hair and a complexion that was enchanting in its loveliness, and as she grew up, her beauty became more and more resplendent, as it was supposed she came to have a Divine touch. She was now twelve and I was fifteen, and it wasn't right that I should be allowed to see much of her, but nobody objected. Was't I the head priest's son, and wasn't she the head priest's property, being a *dev dasi* ? They let me play with her, fondle her, take her to the matron for training as a dancing girl and musician, and do as I pleased, for I told them I knew how she could be fitted for the great service, and her guardians, although rather sceptical, let me have my way, for they dare not offend their head priest's son.

Our intimacy, by and by, developed into some sort of a sentimental feeling which grew, so that her touch began to impart an electric thrill. Perhaps, it was lust for her loveliness. My face quivered when I saw her, and I had a sort of tingling sensation. I became impetuous in making love, for I wanted more and more of this most amazing passion. I was a fool. I began to show an overweening desire for contact, but natural virginal instinct towards self-preservation made her keep aloof from me, even though I had so easily lost my head about her, she kept hers. She became more and more shy and reserved. My way of talking too much for granted evidently repelled her. She was a self-respecting child, and I had alarmed her. She began

to avoid me after that. But my heart was already aflame. Love had become with me a ruling passion, which conceit and imagination had fed.

I must have committed indiscretions, in my madness to be near her, for my father was apprised of the affair. Jealousy that was foreign to his nature was suddenly rampant within him. He called me to his side one day, and in a towering rage exclaimed:

"Thou devil of an offspring, thus to violate the sanctity of the institution! Thou art accursed."

And then he thrashed me within an inch of mv life so that I lay in bed for four months. When I recovered strength enough to walk out into the light of day I learnt that Harivansho having been declared unclean, and therefore unfit for the service of the gods, had been murdered by some,one and her body had been thrown into the river.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### Seventh Night

"I had a dusky fine featured girl visit me to-day. She wanted some black magic done. She was oppressed by her mother-in-law, whom she wanted out of the way."

This was Gangoo speaking, I asked him:—

"Do you believe in black magic?"

"Don't you? he asked.

"Certainly not," was my curt reply.

"I have seen it work with my own eyes," was his comment.

"Have you?" I inquired.

"Lots of times. I can recall a glaring case."

"Once when I was at Ambala Cantonment with the Havildar, an old beggar-woman came to the barracks set apart for soldiers with families, In the

quarter next door to ours there dwelt a Naik who had a plumb little child as lovely as you please. He was playing outside in the verandah, and there wasn't anyone else to watch over him. Only I looked on from behind my window curtain. The beggar-woman took up the child, and kissing him on the lips. blew into his mouth. Then she dropped him. The brat began to howl most lustily, and presently turned black and blue. I shouted to his mother that the beggar-woman had done something to the child, for it lay flat on the ground, not howling but absolutely dumb. Someone ran after the woman, and she was brought to the scene. They were so terribly angry, they tied the hag to a tree and were for burning her alive, when she prayed that her life might be spared and she would do what she could to restore the child to consciousness. She repeated some incantation, and then blew into the little child's mouth once more. You may imagine our surprise when the boy began to howl as lustily as every. He was his old self again. I wonder what it was if not black magic."

"Well, well."

"I remember another instance," Gangoo continued.

"In a village there lived a Muslim girl whose beauty was so extraordinary that it got talked about in the neighbourhoed. Her father was a poor farmer. This girl wss engaged to a rich merchant's son at Lahore.

"One day as she went out to ease herself under a banyan tree, she fell down and went into a fainting fit. It wasn't hysteria, for she had been hale and hearty an hour before, and never had a fit of hysteria before in her life. She was brought to Lahore for treatment and was placed under your father's care. Her father-in-law was your father's friend, and we were requested to leave no stone unturned to effect a speedy cure.

"He did his best, but it as of no avail, The girl was taken back to her village, and your father was to visit her every Sunday. It went on thus for six months. One Sunday, he asked me to go with him. He said that a very queer business we going to be done in the village. He called it spiritual healing. He had been told that the girl was a victim of black magic. The girl was under a spell, a sort of charm. She was said to be under the shadow of an evil spirit. and the witch-doctor was going to heal her.

"We were admitted to an inner chamber, where on a mat lay the poor girl with her relations lurking in the shadows of the pillars. The witch-doctor, who was an old man with a flowing beard dyed red, wearing a tunic, sat near her with a long stick in his hand. The stick was of some thorny bush. The thorns were still visible. He had a book in his hand and was reading something out of it. The room was dimly lighted with an Indian lamp, and there was a strong and pungent smell of burning chillies, and herb, and spices. The room was full of incense.

"Our arrival was a signal for the process to begin. He mumbled something and they began to lay the thorny stick across the girl's back. He belaboured her most mercilessly. It must be hurting her terribly, and the girl howled with pain, but the witch-doctor did not stop, till he was exhausted.

The girl called out '*toba*,' which I think means 'I am sorry.' and repeated the word thrice.

"Say that again," ordered the witch-doctor. She repeated the word thrice again.

"Now tell me who you are," was the question asked by the witch-doctor.

"I am a *jinn*," was the meek response.

"Speak in the name of Hazrat Sulaiman what your name is."

"My name is Jehana"

"Why do you possess this girl?"

"I possess her because she desecrated my tomb."

"Where is your tomb?"

"Right under the banyan tree, in Fazal's field."

"How did she descrate it?"

"She evacuated her bowels right on my head."

"But there are no marks of a tomb under the banyan tree."

"It has been buried under the soil, but it is there all the same."

"Will you leave her, or shall I invoke Hazrat Sulaiman's help?"

"I shall leave her only if you promise to build me a tomb under the tree."

"I give you my pledge that we will."

"Say in the name of Hazrat Sulaiman that you will."

"I swear in the name of Hazrat Sulaiman that we will."

"All right, then I shall be willing to go, but first treat me to a feast of *pulao*. And mark you, it should be a whole goat and a whole cauldron."

"The *pulao* was prepared and a big pan weighing ten seers was cooked. It was placed before the girl. I witnessed the thing with my own eyes. She started swallowing the rice, and in forty minutes she had swallowed the whole quantity. It was a physical impossibility for a delicate girl who had been ailing for six months to accomplish this feat. But I saw her do it with my own eyes.

"Now that you have had a treat," asked the witch-doctor, "will you have the kindness to leave this girl for good?"

"That I will, of course. Do you want that I should leave a manifestation or mark of my visit and departure?"

"None of your visit, if you please. But certainly one of your departure."

The effect of these words was dramatic. There was a terrific crash. The roof of the room was pierced through, and there was a rent big enough for a man to pass through.

"Queer indeed," said I, "Quite, the queerest thing I have ever heard. You mean it is certain evil spirit that are at the back what you call black magic?"

"Who can tell?" was Gangoo's reply.

"Wasn't the girl hurt by the witch-doctor's thrashing?"

"Not the least little bit."

"Did she have any evil effects of thus over-eating herself?"

"She had her meal that evening."

"What is the business of a witch-doctor?"

"He harms one and heals another."

"How do you mean?"

"I will give you an instance."

"A very ugly bride fell to the lot of a very handsome youth, who began to hate her for her looks. The girls mother sought to win the youthful husband over, for otherwise there was no redress. A Hindu husband cannot be divorced. She sought the aid of a witch-doctor or wizard as he is sometimes called. His witchery took the following shape:

"One moonlit night he went to the cremation grounds where that very day a young bachelor's remains had been cremated. He took with him a piece of yarn spun by a virgin. He also took four small wooden pegs, an earthen jug, and a piece of scarlet cloth. The pegs he drove into the ground, one on each corner of the heap of still hot ashes. Then he

passed the yarn round each peg, and sat down on one side to mumble something. He sprinkled the ashes with something liquid. At once there rose a flame of bright incandescent light. This flame ran round the yarn, and then moving into the ashes stopped in the middle of the heap, where it shot up into greater brilliance, and flickered out.

"The witch-doctor picked up the ashes at this spot, and putting in the earthen vessel fastened its mouth with the scarlet piece of cloth. A pinch of the ashes administered in diet is said to make a person the slave of the other for life. The girl gave her husband two pinches in a dish of bolied rice and two pinches she gave to her mother-in-law. Both were demented and died a violent death by their own hands. This is a fact. I can vouch for it. They were under your father's treatment for a long time. The witch-doctor confessed it to me. He was afraid there wasn't an antidote. He had ordered one pinch. I begged that he should let me have some. He gave me a handful. I tried it on a dog. I did not kill him. I ate a pinch myself. No effect I ate four pinches. Still no effect. I thought he was a fraud and told him so. He challenged me to taste some more he would give me. He offered me a thousand rupees if I did. I refused to swallow the bait."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Eighth Night

Gangoo was glum.

"Why, what's up?" I asked.

He heaved a deep sigh and said.

"I wish I were never born!"

"A pious wish," I exclaimed. "But don't you think it is long past praying for now? You have almost

reached the end of the tether, eh! Haven't you, friend Gangoo?"

"Well, then. I wish I were dead and never born again in this unhappy land."

"Is it so bad as that? Why, what is the trouble?"

He heaved another sigh and said nothing.

"Out with it, man, and be slippy about it." I urged.

He still kept mum.

I thought he was touched, deeply touched. He must take his time over it. He must say it in his own way.

"We had a *sat-sang* to-day at Manorma's house."

"Who is Manorma?"

"I thought you knew her name. Well, Manorma is the pretty widow girl at whose place or her mother's you put up Shanti, and Shanti is the girl you rescued from that flagellation camp of the priest"

"O I see! And you had a concert there."

"Not much of a concert, we had a lot of music, though. You see I was invited to give them a spiritual treat"

"Do you happen to be a spiritualist?"

"It is not a spiritualist they want. It is one who can give them a discourse with a play upon the words as to make confusion worse confounded."

"And you are adept at that. Of this I am assured.

"Well, they asked me a number of questions. The first question was:—

"If God is just, how do you account for so much injustice to the women-folk in this country?"

"God is very just indeed." I told them. "It is

our misdeeds that overtake us. We seek to have it as a day all the time. How can that be? Days and nights must alternate. Hours of joy must be followed by those of grief, as night follows day.

"Wait a bit," asked your Shanti. "Do you mean to suggest it is the sins of us women alone that must overtake us, and not those of you men? Should God have so designed things that the women-folk should be punished, always punished, sins or no sins, and the men-folk should be always rewarded in spite of the gravest of their offences? Should there be one set of laws for women, a fairly partial one and quite another set of laws for women, which too should be wholly partial to the interests of the men-folk?"

"The laws are no innovation. They are as old as the hills." I contended.

"That's what I say. They are out of date, and need to be renovated."

"You talk in conundrums," I admonished. "Why beat about the bush and not come to the point at once? You seem to be agrieved. Why not come out with your grievance?"

She related her story which makes one's hair stand on end. If you don't mind, I shall relate it in her own words.

"Go ahead.

He did go ahead, but mentioned names which like all other names of persons and places in all these stories must be revealed. Why not give each a *num de plume*? All right then Shanti speaks:

## The Story

"I am the dadghter of......"

"You mean the boss of the..." reiterated Gangoo. "You take my breath away."

"That does not alter the fact that I am his daughter."

"Why? certainly not. of course," Gangoo put in. "Pray, proceed with your story."

My father was bright even as a boy at school and a youth at college, and he had the gift of the gab. His plausible arguments were very convincing to the man in the street. It is an art you know, picking up the string at the loophole, and tearing it to pieces. I shall give you an instance.

Once there was a very pretty child, and they called it perfect. Well, he couldn't be perfect, you know. Nothing is perfect. in the world. So my father must pick a hole.

"What in him is perfect?" he asked.

"Well," they asked in return, "what isn't? Its form, its feature, its habits, its general behaviour, all are perfect."

"What about its teeth?" was the next question.

"Why, it has a perfect set of teeth. They are like a string of pearls."

"But you will admit," rejoined my father, "that they are a weapon of offence. It might bite with them and bite the hand that feeds it. It bites its mother's nipples. off and on, and this is ingratitude. An ungrateful wretch is worse than a murderer, and this child deserves to be hanged. This much of this world. Now as to the next. Violence is hellish. He wields this weapon of offence to commit violence. No wonder, the verdict of the gods about this child because of this very set of teeth is likely to be—

"To perdition with it."

Such was my father. And he was their accredited leader, because he had a way with them. They had implicit faith in him. If he told them to sleep with their legs pointing skywards, they did not question the hygienics of this mandate. They just literally followed it, arguing in their heart of hearts that it

was meant to keep the sky from crushing them, in case it fell down.

I do not say my father was not sincere. His sincerity was beyond dispute. He gave them the best he could in his own light. If it did not happen to be the best in the light of day, it was his misfortune and not his fault. I was his only daughter. He gave me no education because he did not believe in education, for girls. He said it turned them into hussies. "The scoundrel's abroad," he used to say, "so the maiden's right place is near the hearth."

"But you can't shut her up like that indefinitely. She envies you men-folk the amenities of life you enjoy, and sometimes steals out into sunshine and open air This is just what I did, in spite of his injunctions to the contrary. Hence in consultation with my mother, he hastened to pack me off to my husband's home. My husband was a mere child. I was a head taller than he and a couple of years older. I was pretty, he was anything but handsome. I was virile, he was consumptive, I was vivacious, he had a morbid mind. I was gentle, he was a brute. But my father had chosen a husband for me whom I owed allegiance as such, so even though he was so callous as to let loose a cat in the aviary, even if he called my parents' names, and nicknamed me a bussy, he was still my idol, and even though I had been brought up as a very fiastidious girl, and he never washed his hands after evacuating his. bowels and was always picking his dirty nose at meals, I must still eat no food but his leavings.

My father's counsellors were as bad as he. When, before my wedding, a prominent member of an organisation against the caste system approached my father with a request that he should celebrate the wedding out of caste, to set his followers an example, he said that he sympathisad with the views of

the *Jat Pat Torak Mandal*, but he was helpless in the matter, as he was afraid society convention was too strong even for him. It might break him, if he attempted to break caste. The fact is that he was a leader, and he knew that if he violated the established laws of society, he would lose a part of his following, and then his leadership must go. He was, I am afraid, ambitious, very very ambitious. He told me once that it would break his heart if another stepped into his shoes.

Someone suggested that we were not well-matched—it was before my wedding, of course. My father bade him find a better caste match than that if he could. He had himself tried and failed. A relation had argued that he might not suit our Shanti, being youger and far feebler.

"O as to that," My father had said, "if the boy does not suit the girl, why, the girl will so adjust herself as to fit into his ways all right. All girls do that. And it they don't they should or they must suffer the consequences."

I had a loathing for my husband, in spite of my duty to him. You cannot help your instincts. I had an instinctive hatred of him as of all manner of filth, and filthy ways, and cruel habits.

My mother-in-law was also made in the same mould. She was even worse. Her unceasing gibes and derision and carping and biting, insolent, contemptuous, remarks made her a virago whom one cannot help hating with all one's heart. I execrated her.

So this was the atmosphere in which I began my married iife. I need not dilate on my unceasing attemps to adjust myself to those impossible conditions. Suffice it to say I positively could not fit into them. She nagged and I retaliated. He was taught to be cruel. He was so, instinctively. He could not help being that, any more than he could help being a cad that he was, an over-sexed brute.

But there is a limit to everything. God, they say,

does not favour extremes. His law is inexorable. It crushes the oppressor to a pulp. He was literally crushed to a pulp. His foot slipping off the parapet on which he had got up, to possess himself of the string of a kite that was just going to fly over his head. He fell down from a great height. When they lifted him on to bed, life was already extinct.

So I was a widow. I need not dwell on the very painful rites and subsequent disqualifications of a widow which, you are aware, reduce her to the status of a worm. If she does not succeed in killing her spirit she should kill herself. She is no more than a cringing, creeping worm. A worm is not much of a living thing. But if you seek to crush it, even a worm will turn. My turning round was resented, and rather than send me back to my parents and thus bear the brunt of public disgrace, the wily mother-in-law devised a plan calculated to deprive me of the shelter even of my parental roof.

It was a year since my husband died. She was very friendly for some days. She was even more friendly than a real mother. And this indicates a witch, according to an Indian proverb. She was a vamp. She took me one day to a distant house. It was a poor woman's place. There was only one single room, and that too was extremely dark. Inside this room on a mat lay a woman who seemed to be in great pain. There was another woman waiting on her. This other woman seemed to be a midwife. The labour was painful, but she was delivered of a son after all. The woman was my sister-in-law. She had been putting up to an aunt's house in a village. She had come to this midwife for her delivery. I was asked to stay in and attend on the woman. I did not go back home. My things were sent on to that place instead, mine and mother-in, law's. She took the child, and we both departed leaving the woman behind. We went to Rawalpindi. I was told to own the child and call it my own child I was only too glad to do so, for it was a very pretty child.

It was given out there I had a caked breast. So a wet nurse was engaged for the baby. The house where we stayed was that of an aunt of my husband. I stayed there for a full year and began to love that baby even more than I would have loved my own baby, if I had one. But it remained a mystery to me all the while, why the mother had discarded the baby.

Then all at once a letter came from my father that was not fit to be called daughter. The news had gone the round of the press that I had given birth to a son and it was a natural child. My mother-in law rushed to Rawalpindi. She brought me in hot haste to Hardwar.

It was the greatest shock of my life I had to part with my darling baby and my pretty locks. I subsequently learnt that the baby's mother had been deserted by her husband who had married a new wife at Siam. If he heard of his wife's wicknedness, he would certainly turn her down, and refuse even to support her as he did.

"How did you happen to be in that temple?"

"The scoundrel takes in widows. And then he commits an outrage on their honour."

## CHAPTER XXV

### Ninth Night

"How about Manorma?'l I asked Gongoo.

"What about her?"

"Had she a similar experience?"

"No, but she is a virgin widow. Her husband died ten hours after the wedding ceremony."

"What did he die of?"

"She did not go to his house at all, eh?"

"Did not set foot in his place."

"And her ornaments?"

"Her mother kept them They were the bridegroom's gift, of course. The widow would need them to make both ends meet."

"Did not her husband's people claim the girl as their son's widow?

"They did, of course. But Manorma's mother knew better than to send her to penal servitude, which is the lot of a widow in this land."

"But how has she managed to keep her virtue intact?"

"No woman who has lost her mate can manage to keep her virtue intact, according to popular belief, unless she has her sexual instincts what they call sublimated. The idea is to give the girl a sort of enlightenment, a glimpse of her own and for that matter, her husband's soul. It is generally accepted that sex is the vital force of life. Minus this activity life is drab. And if one ceases to be interested in life, one is as good as dead. Death comes to her, premature death, either of sexual starvation, developing itself into some heart disease, or by her own hand.

"It couldn't be that." I amended. "If it were so, how could such a lot of our widows live to ripe old age?"

"I am coming to that," said Gangoo. "If any succeed in converting the sex activity which is gross to subtle sex activity, they are said to have sublimated their sexual urge This sexual urge, far from being directed towards physical beauty, is so refined as to direct its force towards spiritual beauty. This is a point which no layman can properly explain, for laymen cannot possibly conceive anything that is not perceptible to the object of their erotic love. The ascetics, however, I mean very old members of the fraternity, can easily and convincingly explain what this spiritual life is, and how it can be consummated.

Manorma and her mother have been seeking such ascetics all along, and borrowing from them, off and

on, this supreme force of sublimation. They are convinced that continence is possible only if sublimation or the refinement of the grosser side of our nature has been achieved. This they have been told is well within the range of hnman experience.

That night again Gangoo continued the most astounding mystery of Harvansho's disappearance which he unfolded as follows :—

It was the barber youth who brought this news. He had it from the market place, between the town and the suburb to which he had repaired to make some purchases. He had it from the lips of a pariah woman who had come from an up country village on the bank of the river to sell her stock of vegetables. The woman had the news at first hand from a fish-wife who was her next-door neighbour. The fish-wife had imparted it to her with an air of importance and had even shown her the net. The fish wife's story was as follows :—

" The man had cast their nets over-night and had repaired to the *Fakir's* hut that stood on a rocky prominence that overhung the river. There was a thick growth of bushes, on the steep rock, but higher up there was a clearing, and here was the hut leaning against the rocky wall Its roof was covered with climbing ground wines. From this hut one could look up and down the river until it disappeared behind a dense groove of banyan trees. They often went to the *fakir* to pull at *hookah* and kill time.

In the small hours of the night they came back expecting a big haul. One of the nets was so heavy it couldn't be easily hauled in. When it was dragged out at last they were amazed to find caught in it a sack. When it was opened imagine their consternation and dismay to discover a human body, the body of a fair-skinned girl bound and gagged. The sack had been loaded with big stones to make it sink down and drown the girl. They carried the girl's body to the *fakir* who somehow succeeded in reviving her, for she was not yet

quite dead. The girl had been left in the service of the *fakir*, and must still be there.

You may be sure I did not need a second bidding to rush to the fish-wife's village and by tipping the fishermen got one of them to accompany me to the *fakir's* hut. It was deserved We thought the *fakir* had gone on his rounds, and went to all his haunts, but not a trace of him could we discover. At the railway station, a small wayside affair, we were informed that an old man and a very pretty girl had been seen boarding the train bound for Chikardhapore,

I went home, and getting together a few ornaments of my mother, and as much of the temple cash as I could gather at the shrine, made my way to the nearest railway station and arrived at Chikardharpore the next day, to discover that the birds had flown. I followed them up to Howrah, and there I lost all trace of them.

I sold my mother's ornaments and by the help of a Sikh motor-driver who taught me how to drive a car, got a taxi, and began to ply it searching, all the while, for my lost treasure. I had all sorts of fares who wanted me to conduct them to the slums and the Chinese quarter. I learnt that this is the part in which prostitutes and keepers of disorderly houses prefer to have their dens. I was soon quite familiar with such haunts, but I was not admitted to any of them although I was on tenter hooks to go in and find out if Harivansho's whereabouts could be traced from any of these women of sins.

I had to wait. and a tedious job it was, to be sure, for sometimes the secret lovers stayed in. till early dawn. Late one night I felt like having a cup of tea. and smoking a few *bidis*. So leaving my car I went to a tea shop. The tea was delicious. I began to frequent this shop and soon was on terms of acquaintance with the stall-keeper. One night when I found him alone, I confided my secret to him. He said it was like looking for a needle in a hay-stack. There were as many as 30,000 registered prostitutes in Calcutta, over and above the

multitude of those who somehow managed successfully to escape the eye of the law, and carried on traffic in human souls as respectable women, in respectable quarters of the town. He was not so sure my Harivansho could be persuaded to join these dens of debauchery, which because of their notoriety could not entertain decoys so easily. My beloved he was sure, could be traced, only in the upper circles. He knew some addresses, but was afraid it wasn't much use, for I could not possibly be allowed to patronise any of these establishments because of my inferior position. He, however, gave me the college address of a Bengali youth, whose case was parallel to mine, and who being the scion of a very rich family of *Zamindars* had easy access to all these establishments. He informed me that the boy too was love-lorn, his beloved who was a Sindhi girl having been lost, and he was afraid either done to death, or forcibly detained in any one of the establishments. He frequented a tavern, of which he gave me the address, and told me to make common cause with the lad. Perchance in an attempt at discovering my friend's beloved I might hit upon my own.

It was no use seeking him out in the college hostel. He might not encourage him to meet him among his dignified friends. Why not catch him alone at the tavern? This seemed to be the only feasible plan. So I too began to frequent that tavern, and through judicious sipping learnt that the youth in question came at 8 and left at about 9. I did not stay long. I found him the next day, and the next when he was alone. He offered me a drink, and then I returned the compliment, and through this avenue of a common caste I got into his good books and by and by we became very chummy. But for the gloom that seemed to be settled down upon him he struck me as a judicious fellow enough. I unfolded to him the tale of my woes. He cast a searching glance at me seeking to penetrate

my soul, and then feeling reassured of the genuineness of my sorrow, sympathised with me and asked me my trade. I frankly owned that I was mere taxi-driver. He thought it was well, for it would make the task easier.

One Sunday evening he met by appointment and took me to a den. It is was a restaurant. We had a room and a table all to ourselves. He confessed to me the most astounding history of his love affair, which I shall reproduce in his own words.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### Tenth Night

Gangoo greeted me one night with the welcome news which I had waited for, for so long, said he :

" Our Sheela has been traced. The *Devi* who took her away is at Manorma's house. She comes from a settlement way up in the hills. The queen of this settlement is Leela Leela you know, is Sheela's mother. So mother and daughter have been united at last. It is really delightful."

" Delightful !" exclaimed I in dismay. " You call that delightful ! And how about us ?"

" You will be glad to know we have been invited to visit the mother and daughter in their colony. The *Devi* who enticed our Sheela away will conduct us to the place. We start at 4 a. m. to-morrow. Is not this news? I really feel elated. And how about you, Doctor ? My congratulations."

Gangoo did not feel like retiring for the night. Nor did I. He paced up and down the verandah and then turning to me asked," Do you know who is coming to fetch us to-morrow ?" I shook my head listlessly.

" Do you know," he asked again, " who Raghu's beloved was, and how she came to be at Hardwar ?"

" You talk in riddles," I rejoined.

" Why not finish Raghu's death-bed story ?"

" Shall I finish it in Raghu's own words ?"

"Nothing like having a fellow on his death-bed tell his own tale."

"Raghu was going to relate the Bengali youth's tale last night when he was interrupted by your snores. Let him finish it to-day.

"Madhusoodhan was the youth's name. He was the only son of a very rich Zamindar. He rolled in wealth. All these Bengali Zamindars do. Money comes easy to them and so far as the young folk are concerned, it goes easy too.

They seek to get the most out of life. Among the worshippers of Sakti to which cult our Madhusoodan belonged sexuality comes as a creed. Some of them observe the most disgusting rites They give themselves up to unbridled licence, and their orgies are revolting. To stifle their remorse they invest their moral turpitude with a religious sanction. This worship of profligacy, however, is a rare event conducted most mysteriously by the profligate rich.

It was at one such orgy that Madhusoodhan met his beloved. She dropped from Heaven knows where into the hall, close upon her heels was an ugly man Madhu could read on his bloated countenance and horrid features nothing but lust and licentiousness. The girl was amazingly lovely. To Madhu it was as though a heavenly radiance had flooded the room. And she was his evening partner. It was as though he had been transported to heaven. When the worship was just on the point of commencing, like a decoy she led him out into the quadrngle where she melted into thin mist leaving him lamenting. It was like a fairy tale. And yet every word of it was truth.

Madhusoodhan led me to the back door of ancient house in a side lane. He rapped on the shuttes with a rhythmical tapping that spoke of a preconcerted sign We were admitted by an old woman. We were conducted to a side room, lit by a paraffin lamp. On the walls were cheap pictures. The room was reekingof paraffin On one side was a bed, and beside it were three chairs,

and a small table. It was a grimy place. The woman motioned us to a chair, and herself sat down on the bed right in front of our eyes. No decent woman even sits on a bed in the presence of strangers. She must once have been marvellously beautiful, but now she was elderly, and had deep black semi-circles beneath her eyes. There were deep furrows running from the nostrils to the corners of the mouth. Her breasts had already greatly fallen.

"Where is Nalini ?" asked Madhu.

"I shall just conduct her here," she said as she left the room returning presently with a girl, who was a tantalizing witch. Her beauty was supernatural. Madhu told her he had not come to stay the night, but wanted Nalini to entertain me. I excused myself by saying I wasn't then in the best of health, and would prefer to retire too. Only I wanted to have their opinion on the subject so near to my heart They heard my story, wistfully I think. and after some deliberation the elder woman said I was a fool to look for the girl among the town harlots. The police was too vigilant to allow of any fresh recruitment to their ranks, especially when a man was leading a girl about. The fakir must have led the girl to someone of the big zemindars whose tout was the priest of Serampore, who was the only person who could direct me to my beloved or tell me her whereabouts.

I went to Serampore and got myself enlisted as his disciple.

It was a matter of a few years before I could be possessed of the information I sought. Meanwhile I worked assiduously towards my salvation. I learnt—

1. That even among the high classes, there are cases of vulgar parents who even at an age when passions should remain unawakened train their children in words and deeds revolting to modesty. Licentious conversation, lewd songs, obscene verses sung even by women disgusting expressions which they are encouraged to use even as witticisms, shameless stories even about some of

the deities, the allegorical meanings of so many of our everyday customs and usages, pictures of disgusting obscenity to be met with on the walls of our ancient buildings, all these things are calculated to excite the lewd imagination of our youths and men. And there is a deplorable lack of sex education which is the only means by which we can counteract these beneful influences. You know that it is no use to be an ostrich with your head in the sand and yet we refuse to face facts or meet them squarely with a view to reform.

2 Among the women there are crowds of widows in the prime of life who are forbidden to remarry. They are chaste enough as they go, but in our tropical climate they are easily excited and if convinced their misconduct will not be found out, they sometimes abandon themselves to odious crimes revolting to our sense of morality. They often give out that they are going on a pilgrimage, but the supposed pilgrimage ends in a neighbouring village at the house of someone interested in the villainy, who helps them to live in seclusion, until such time as they are delivered and then the result of of their misconduct somehow disposed of, they return to the bosom of the family as if nothing untoward had happened In a majority of cases these widows are merely victims of man's devilry. But that does not alter the fact that their fall from virtue is due to their sex ignorance.

3. Young men are permitted by society to give themselves up to the filthiest of pleasures, and if they are rich they still remain moral, irreproachable respectable, if after having satiated their lust for debauchery they marry a young innocent girl making her unhappy for life. If she allows herself to deviate from the so-called path of virtue, and succumb to an irresistible temptation she must be clever enough to hide her voice from spiteful eyes. If she fails to hide her misdeed. Heaven help the poor wretch for then she is doomed. Men have one set of laws for themselves, and quite her for their women-folk.

On the whole the women are naturally chaste. A few lapses attributable to human frailty is no proof of their want of chastity as a body. It can be said without fear of contradiction that the Indian woman is more chaste than any other woman in the world. They are characterised by a dormant coldness of disposition. Rather than take to vice if driven to despair by the ill-treatment of a brutal husband, or by the annoyances of a spiteful mother-in-law, or by any of the domestic worries, they destroy their life which has become unbearable.

4. Attached to certain temples are dancing girls called *dev dasies*. They are beautiful women who are forced to make a public traffic of their charms, and are consecrated to the worship of the gods. Their official duty it is to dance and sing before the gods twice daily. They may be present at marriages and other ceremonies too. They are brought up in shameful licentiousness even from their infancy.

They are recruited from all castes. Sometimes a pregnant woman with the object of obtaining a safe first delivery makes a vow to devote the child if it happens to be a girl to the service of the temple. These *dev dasies* receive a fixed salary. They may supplement it by other means. When they are old and retire from the temple service they start a tobacco or betel shop.

5. What is the universe and what is God? I have studied this question at some length and now that I am on my last legs it is only right that I should leave behind through you the final fruit of my laborious research. We *sanyasies* belong to the sect called *Adwaita*. We are more numerous than other sects. There are some of the most learned men among us. We believe that nothing exists but God. What you see around you and what you term the universe is nothing but an illusion or *Maya*. It has no more significance than things we see in a dream. These illusions amanate from God. They are mere phantasies of a divine soul. The image forms itself in Him and like a projected

picture on the screen is an illusion to the Projected but the characters on the screen are very real to each other. To us the universe exists as a reality. To him it is a mere phantasy. Our object is to be delivered from this illusion by a diligent contemplation of Self.

Raghu was apprised by someone in the cult, that Harivansho had actually been brought to the high priest, and a forced wedding between her and a debauch whose name was Kumar had been celebrated. Kumar and Harivansho had left for Benares, whence they had not come back.

Raghu had therefore joined the group of *Sadhus*, who were going to Benaras and Hardwar and other places by way of a pilgrimage. He had been drugged and had accepted the hospitality of a Bengalee widow at whose place he had subsequently expired but not before he had made his confession to a brother *sanyasi*.

Early next morning Gangoo and I were taken by the group of girls on their way to Mahilagarh. This group was being led by the very girl who had decoyed our Sheela and whom I had the honour to meet at Hardwar.

On inquiry she told me her name was Harivansho, We talked rather freely with each other on sundry topics. She owned that she had seen Tanjaur as well as Serampore. She said she was a widow, but refused to throw any further light on the points raised by Gangoo in Raghu's confession.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### Sex Utopia

"It comes to this," said Leela, "that If a girl is widowed or otherwise discarded by her husband in the present chaotic state of your society, she should either kill her spirit and reduce herself to the status of a worm, or failing that take to prostitution, to save herself from sheer starvation."

"Excuse me," said I, "this is not a correct

analysis of the situation. Many widows are happily settled in their parents' or parents-in-laws' homes. There are some who work for a living, seamstresses for instance. There are others who have espoused the cause of social reform and even politics. It is the degraded variety that take to prostitution for a livehood."

"Many, I say, take to the drab sort of life you describe by actually killing their natural impulses. But many more that fail to suppress the dictates of their nature, to subdue their passions and kill their sexual instincts, why, what about them?"

"They have no business to think of erotic love after the demise of their lords."

"That is the mandate of the powers that be in our social autocracy. The die-hards of the sterner sex! Do they kill their erotic passions after the death of their wives? You know they don't They wed another. Then why enforce widowhood upon the fair sex similarly bereaved?"

"We can't help the laws that have come down to us from our forefathers."

"There you are. You men cannot help your man-made laws. You domineering men! And we of the fair sex? Well, we are the weaker vessel, born for subjugation. The laws are eternal and the yoke is enternal. No wonder you preach Stoicism —complete submission to the Divine will, isn't it? If it were not for that the fair sex might some day learn to resist your authority. So you have given your man-made laws a colour Divine. And lest the women-folk smarting under your heel should be enlightened, and throw you over, your society autocrats will not concede to us the right to educate ourselves. I tell you your arrogant laws are the limit. We have borne and forborne a lot. The strain of oppression has now reached the breaking point. We shall break all bonds. And then..............

"Well, then?" I queried.

"Then Heaven help you, overbearing men!"

She had evidently flown into a passion.

"The woman is lording it over the world." I put in meekly. It was mum's word.

"In the Western world, at least."

There was no response.

"And domestic peace in the Western world is conspicuous by its absence."

"Excuses are not wanting where will is wanting," she broke forth. "The woman must be kept under perpetual bondage in the interest of domestic peace. Without that domestic peace it would evaporate. The woman would refuse to drudge for the home. She would positively decline to undergo painful labour and the human race would soon cease to exist. That is how you men are wont to argue. It is the way with you, The destruction of domestic peace. That is the bogey you have set up. The woman will not druge. The human race will cease to exist; and so forth.

"My good Doctor, you should have the sense to understand that woman cannot do without man any more than man can do without woman. Each is a complement of the other. If man must have recourse to woman directed by his sexual urge, woman too must respond to his overtures directed by her instinct for motherhood, If man exerts to provide the home with necessaries, the woman too is bound to exert herself to keep the house in shape, and feed the members of the household. In countries where domestic peace is extinct, it is not the woman that is to blame. It is the high standard of living, to maintain which both the husband and the wife must strive outside the home. It is the social demands on women that call for their absence from home for longer hours than is good for them. It is their training, their culture that is to blame We do not advocate. Western culture. We only ask for

adult marriages; for choice marriages, for permission to divorce a hopeless husband afflicted with some venereal disease, or otherwise making himself obnoxious to his wife and *vice versa*."

"Well," said I, "you will admit this reform cannot be brought about by wishful thinking, or blasphemy, or a revolution. It can at best be a slow affair. Prostitution cannot lead us to it, anyway."

"It certainly cannot. We know of another way of escape."

"May I know what it is?

"Sex, you know, is the sublimest of all instincts. If it is controlled so that it is partly sublimated and in part gratified and that for procreation only, domestic peace is easily attained. Ours is a case in point."

This, here, is the *math* or convent of a cult of *Vedantists*. It is presided over by Swami Vithal Dev, the world-renowned *Vedantist*. It has very extensive fields and forests attached to it as a permanent holding It consists of a valley the other side of which terminates into the Doon Valley, a hill with a thick jungle and extensive tiers of terraced farms, and this valley. This is inhabited exclusively by ladies, of whom I have been elected the queen. The hill monastery is peopled by married couples. The valley over the hill is the home of bachelors.

The ladies' settlement is hemmed in between hills and is aptly called *Mahilagarh* or a fortress of ladies. The home of the married couples is called *Staragarh*. The home of the bachelors is known as *Vallabgarh* which means fortress of the mighty. Each settlement is a sort of local republic. Their local management is carried on by an elected president.

All the three settlements are administered for religious purposes by the great Guru Vithal Dev who is the court of appeal for all of us, and the final

authority on all subjects whether secular or religious. He has his home on that high hill in the east. You see that huge temple with marble cupolas. That is the place. The guardian of the temple is *Guru Dev* himself. He has a fourth settlement of his own there which is inhabited by eminent practical spiritualists. The settlement is known as *Purabgarh.*

We in *Mahilagarh* are chiefly widows, discarded by society as worthless. It so happens that a majority of us are rather pretty. We are now scrupulously virtuous—you might call us chaste too—although we cannot claim to have been chaste and virtuous. once not very long ago, for most of us were fast women, prostitutes like myself. I may as well confess that prostitution is no way of escape for a widow, or for one deserted by her husband. She finds no peace in a life of sin. It only aggravates her restlessness, disquiet, misery. They call such life hellish. If there can't be anything worse, I concede that it is hellish. The only way of escape is through *Mahilagarh.* I will show you how."

Sukhdai was summoned. Sukhdai was one of her counsellors. She must have been a very pretty girl, when she was a girl. But now she was old, very old older even than Leela. But she was hale. Leela greeted her with a smile.

"This is Sukhdai, our senior counsellor." said Leela by way of an introduction, "and this is Doctor Tej Bhan of Lahore."

We bowed to each other and Sukhdai took her seat on a mat at a respectful distance from her queen.

"The Doctor isn't sure," Leela began, "if we of the fair sex are really being wronged by the *samaj.* I have told him that every single denizen of our colony is so wronged. He is curious to hear the life-story of our first counsellor. Would you mind gratify-

ing his curiosity for my sake? It will be a personal favour."

Sukhdai was sometime making up her mind. Then, she began the most interesting details of her story, which I here reproduce.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A Society Wedding.

I hail from Gujrat I was born three quarters of a century ago in the house of a *Mahajan*, a fairly well-to-do merchant. I was an only child. and must have enjoyed all the amenities of life that come to the share of a girl who is an only child of rich parents. I can recollect scenes of my early childhood. I had a number of playmates. We played at house-keeping. How pretty were the dolls that father brought me. They envied me my dolls, and we had mock weddings. I then had no idea that I too would have to pass through a similar mock wedding to be handed out to a stranger, as though, I too were an inanimate doll.

An Indian maiden is treated by her parents as if she had no feeling in her.

"Excuse me," interrupted I "This is much too sweeping a statement, and you know it has no foundation in fact. Indian parents love their daughters too well to let them play ducks and drakes with love. You cannot deny they invariably help the young folk contract a happy match in spite of the young parties having no voice in the choice of a life's companion."

Sukhdai was piqued. She resumed her story with the remark.

"I don't suppose I need argue the point you advance beyond letting the facts speak for themselves. You may draw your own conclusion.

"I was fortunate in being sent to the street temple to have my lessons, till I was a grown-up girl, and my lessons ceased to interest me. Just then my life came to have a touch of romanee. On my way I used to see

a handsome boy. He stood by the pillar-box waiting for me, all by himself. I often thought of this boy. I was almost in love with him. As I passed him by I saw a smile playing on his delicate features. I returned his smile. One day I was returning from the temple. A drizzle had commenced. He was there as usual. As I looked at him and our eyes met, I dropped a book and passed on without missing it. He picked up the book and ran after me. As he politely handed me my book, there was an earnest appeal in his eyes. I took the book and smiled at him. This was how the romance began. We vowed eternal friendship and met again and again. One day Janak—that was the boy's name—told me something which I could not listen without deeply blushing. No woman can ever forget the kiss that seals her eternal love. He was to be mine. I was to be his. It was true love, and true love they say is eternal.

But true love is a sentiment for which there isn't any room in our ties, and which has therefore no business to enter the heart of an Indian maiden. She is not expected to be a sentimental fool. She must wed whomsoever her parents want her to. They found for me a husband whom I had never seen nor heard of. I met Janak for the last time. He was stunned to hear the news. He said that Vachan—my fiance—was his classmate. He was the worst scoundrel he had ever come across. He was a regular bully, but a rich one. But rich men's faults are easily overlooked, and he passed for a gentleman. Janak said that he was desperately in love with me, that the news had broken his heart that he was not sure if he could outlive my wedding to a fellow whom he knew to be no better than a crook.

You do not know the terrible lot of a girl whose heart is not her own, and who has to love someone she hates by reputation. My father loved me and so did my mother, but I could not confess to them the state

of my feellings. You may call it prudery, but there it was. I was carried away by the impression that it was not sensible on the part of a girl to talk to her parents about her likes and dislikes in the choice of a mate. So even though I felt I was being pushed down a precipice, down a bottomless pit, yet I could not make up my mind to speak to them on the point. They noticed my general depression, but did not attribute it to their oppression. They only thought it was the prospect of my having to leave my home that was causing me to pine away so.

Kamla was my best friend, so to speak a chum. I laid bare my heart to her. She promised to talk it over with my mother. There was a ray of hope. My mother might ask my opinion and I would have an opportunity to speak to her. I would open my heart, shedding tears of blood. My mother's heart was sure to be melted, and I might be rid of the man they were going to tie me, to. When Kamla came, I was with my mother. She began by asking if there was anything she could towards the preparations for the wedding. She said she knew Vachan. He was a distant relation. My mother was glad to hear it. I was just going to slip away, when she held me by the wrist. I twisted myself free from her grip, and ran away to hide myself behind a curtain. I could distinctly hear their talk. Kamla said. "Theirs is a very rich family."

"One of the richest in Amritsar," replied my mother.

"But beauty is none of their gifts. The mother is ugly as a toad."

"What is beauty but facial make-up?" rejoined my mother. "It is the pride of a prostitute."

"But our Sukhdai has the looks of a fairy and Vachan, to be quite frank, looks no better than your groom, the fellow who stables your horses, and rubs their coats to make them look sleek."

My mother was greatly offended and bade her hold her peace keeping her counsel for those who asked for it. She snubbed her thus for full five minutes, till almost in tears Kamla left.

As the day of my wedding arrived, my heart began to sink, At such times one seeks to have a confident. How I wished I could have my Janak about me. But it couldn't be. I could not get into touch with him, for I was surrounded by young girls of my acquaintance. The day of the marriage party's arrival dawned like my doomsday. They sent on the ornaments and clothes. The bride must be wedded in her parental dress. Then she puts on her in-law's gifts. They had sent three seers of gold ornaments, and all manner of sarees richly embroidered in gold lace. Was it any consolation ? Far from it. It filled my heart with disgust, this diplay of wealth. It was wealth that had stood in the way of Janak's wedding me. I was being sold for gold.

The nuptials came and went. Vachan was clumsy. The sermon was long drawn out. Vachan was dirty. He smelt abominably, and I was so fastidious. I had a sickening sensation having to sit by him so long.

"Do you know why he smelt so ?" I asked.

"No, I don't"

"He must have been afflicted with some sexual disorder. It is always betrayed by a rotten smell."

"May be you are right. He suffered from all sorts of sexual disorders. In fact, he was so hopelessly lost he had nothing of sexuality left in him. He did not need a wife at all. I was being needlessly thurst on him. His people wanted to celebrate something. They had so much money they did not know what to do with it. They felt like throwing it away, and their son's wedding afforded them an excuse. It was squandered on fire-works and partly on prostitutes. and parties where wines of the rarest old vintages.

flowed like water. When they had done with feasting. they sat down to take accounts. Eighty thousand rupees had been spent I have often tried to think out why sensible men who will not spend a penny to relieve a poor blind beggar, lose their balance to such an extent as to think nothing of throwing away a whole fortune.

Isn't it like a buffalo run amuck digging and tearing away at a field grown with turnips which are to provide it food, during the whole of winter ? I am sure it is their beastliness run riot. Vachan's recklessness landed him in serious trouble. He had taken a drop too much—nay, I should say a gallon too much, and when they laid him in bed, beside me on my first wedding night, dead drunk, you may imagine my disgust at seeing him so.

I am afraid I am boring you with dry as-dust facts. Suffice it to say, he showed himself in more ways than one that he wasn't a man who should have been allowed to wed by law. But he had wrecked my life with impunity, and the law provided me with no redress. In another country the laws would certainly have allowed me a divorce. But in this country you do not happen to have any divorce laws for us folk. We must bear and forbear without grumbling. This is the "Divine Law" for women.

Over and above the husband curse, I had the mother-in-law curse. Between them they had made my life so wretched. I wished I were never born; atleast never thrust into this family where my parents' cupidity or merely indiscretion had landed me

Two years after my wedding, I lost my husband and was a widow It should not have made any difference, but I learnt to my cost that is made such a world of difference between a terrible distressed girl, whose husband even though afflicted as mine, was alive, and an accursed woe-begone widow who had lost hers, through no fault of her own, no sins

of this incarnation or another. An innocent maiden who has done you no wrong is able certainly to look you in the face. She hasn'a guilty conscience, so she isn't ashamed. She loses her husband, and overnight she is so contaminated, so terrible a sinner that if she dares to look you in the face you are tempted to tear out those bright beautiful orbs. A thief, a murderer, the worst type of offender who has done one's nearest relatians to death is less condemnable than the poor harmless widow. One can tolerate a felon, but not a widow. She is looked upon as a blight whose evil eye cannot fail to destroy. If you meet her first thing in the morning you must call her a dozen names, otherwise misfortune will dog your footsteps If she meets you when you are going out you may be sure the enterprise on which you are out is doomed to an ignominious failure! If she shows her unlucky face at a function, it must end in a tragedy. Like a witch she is supposed to be the precursor of ill-luck and if she is not lynched, it is through no clemency of the people. It is the grip of law that protects her.

"Hadn't we better proceed from the point you entered the golds of this cult?" I said a bit bored.

"Well, if you don't mind," said she, somewhat annoyed. "I shall hurry through the earlier events to establish a link.

"My life was so wretched, and the drudgery so great that I thought if I allowed myself to stand it much longer the worry and strain would kill me. So I wrote to my parents to apprise them of my intolerable situation. They sent word that I should be sent to them. Mark you they sent word only, and not a woman to fetch me away, which they would certainly have done had my husband been alive. You see I wasn't needed now, even by my own parents. But my heart was full, and I wished to lay it bare before my mother. So even though I felt piqued, I set my heart on going. My mother-in-law was

only too glad to rid herself of me. A bullock cart was sent for, and alone I was packed off through the jungle country.

I did not know that there was any danger lurking ahead. There is danger in every country for a pretty widow travelling alone. We travelled for three days and then, when the place looked most deserted all at once a rider came out from behind a thicket. There was an altercation between the driver and the rider, for the latter started to bargain with the former for the sale of the bullock. The price he offered was low. The driver was going to move ahead, when the rider was joined by two others on foot. They had *lathis*, but so had my driver. Just then two more came from another thicket and one of them had a blunderbuss. which he let off with such a terrific noise that it turned my heart to water. The driver dropped his *lathi* and made himself scarce. I too was going to follow suit, but I was pursued and carried on horseback to a distant cavern, which was the den of these robbers. What they did to me is too horrible to contemplate, and I am not going to weary you with a detailed account to men's atrocities. Suffice it to say, I was rescued by no other man than Janak himself. Janak was the ring-leader of the gang, He lived in a town in comparative ease I was presented to him. When he learnt that I was a widow he was sympathetic. When I told him of the assault of his men, he took them seriously to task. He kept me about his person, but I noticed that his old ardour for me had cooled. One day he openly confessed me that he still loved me, but only as a brother would love a sister. I asked him the reason of his change towards me. He related the following story, which I shall reproduce in his own words.

### The Girl at the Temple

" The other day men succeeded in kidnapping a little boy. They brought tbe kid to me. He was so pretty I could not find it in my heart to do him to death, because of his jeewls I decided to risk taking him

home that night, which I did. The kid who was barely four was afraid to go upstairs, when I left him at his door. He wanted me to come with him. I went, but the fool aroused his people and I did not want to show my face and thus betray my gang. My path downstairs having been obstructed, I passed into the house next door. I was in the kitchen. What I saw took my breath away. A girl of extreme loveliness even in her rags was washing a whole lot of utensils. She was going to scream, when I shut her mouth, gagging her with my hand.

"I won't do you any harm if you let me pass out, I said.

She did not move. I removed my hand. She did not raise a hue and cry. I quickly passed out of the house, but not without carrying impress of her beautiful face on my very impressionable heart. I began to frequent the place thereafter. I learnt from the servants that she was the widow, hated by all in the house, for on the day she stepped into the house, her husband died by his own hand. "Her mother-in-law attributed his death to her. "He was scared stiff," she said, "at the sight of the malevolent face of the witch. This is why he did himself to death." It was their vengeance on that orphan girl. She was made to drug from the small hours of the night to as late as midnight. And she was being slowly starved to death.

I got her alone after the morning worship, in the temple garden. It was all I could do to convince her of my intentions for her well-being. She would not believe me. As we were chatting thus, who should surprise us but her husband's elder brother. She hid her face behind the veil of her head-dress, She could not speak in self-defence because of *purdah*. He denounced her before the whole congregation, and got the *Panchayat* to excommunicate her as a fast woman. This drove her to my fold. I am keeping her in a house up-country. She is my mistress, and I propose to wed her.

Then I heard of the Mahilagarh organisation. I was introduced to them by a girl who was a member. Here I found real peace. You will wonder how. You have only to study our principles and you will be convinced.

Life, you know, is a struggle. Struggle for existence, they call it. We must struggle or we cease to exist. A lazy fellow who does not care to move his little finger has the worst of the struggle. He makes no physical effort. Hence his struggle is all mental, which takes the shape of a thousand and one mental worries. Worries come naturally to him. Without them he would go mad, dash his head against a rock and die. This we of this *Vedantic* cult realise only too well. Occupation of one kind or another is the very essence of our existence. More work, less worry, is our maxim. So we are all kept occupied in one way or another, physically, intellectually and spiritually.

We in all the three monasteries look to our *Guru Dev* for spiritual guidance. He believes it isn't any forced precepts that bring an individual's salvation. It is his or her personal practice that does the trick. To succeed, this practice has to be automatic and voluntary and therefore agreeable to the individual's taste. You can't serve the same spiritual food to all mankind, any more than you can satisfy the whole country with the same culinary vegetable. Tastes differ, hence to cater for a group the dishes to be served to the individuals must also vary. This is why we need to have a *Guru Dev* to guide us and feed us spiritually. You will be applied to hear of the spiritual food he supplies to a man or woman of sin such as a prostitute. It is akin to the spiritual food he or she is used to. His intellectual food too is the same, varying with individuals, as also his physical food. I am afraid I shall bore you if I enter into details. Suffice it to say, he knows how to feed us all spiritually, intellectually and physically.

"And what about moral food?"

"It is silly to suppose that we need food even for

the moral side of our nature. Morality is not anything that can be fitted on as a ready-made suit It develops automatically provided that the spiritual, intellectual and physical sides are being maintained by healthy wholesome food. Our *Guru Dev* not only ensures healthy wholesome food in all the three aspects of our life, but also makes sure that we are neither over nor under-fed. He watches our development and studies our comfort assiduously, and he has such a way with sinners, sinners of society and all sorts of sinners, that their proclivity to sinfulness slowly changes itself into diligent pursuit of healthful activity.

"How does he manage to keep you all busy, throughout the day ?"

"We have occupations assigned to us just the same as you have occupation assigned to you in secular life. We must till the soil and produce our own food. We must spin the yarn and weave our own cloth. We must prepare our own clothes, we must keep accounts, see to our cleanliness, and hygiene, see to our education and do all that you do. We lack nothing,—land, labour, capital. We work our own salvation physically, intellectually, spiritually ?"

"But how about your social laws ?"

"They are the same as in civilised society. Sex education is the first essential. We keep ladies apart in their own convent or nunnery to work for the bachelors too—to clothe them, and partly to feed them. They conduct herbal medicinal research and work to relieve mankind of all the varied ills to which human body is heir. There is a purveyor who caters for the needs of the *Rishis* out of a trance.

"How about marriages ?"

"They are by choice. We aim at einsuring domestic peace."

"And widows ?"

"They are allowed to remarry ?"

"Even outside your fold ?"

"Even outside our fold."

# Are You All In ???



If so prepare yourself for a big day, for thanks to a life-time of Spiritual Research by Swami Sarvada Nand of Benares, the greatest Rishi of Modern times, we are new in a position to hand out to you the Master-key of Fate. Born under an unlucky star you can conteract its malvolent influence and convert your straitened circumstances into affluence, your illness to vigorous health, your miserable plight to glowing joyfulness, a calamitous situation into absolute security, a failure to remarkable success. This Master Key of Fate can help solve all your problems, realise your highest ambition, without so much as an effort on your part. It can turn all hearts towards you, so that honours come to you unsought. favours are granted unsolicited, many a boon you find at your door-step. and those who eluded you now begin to follow at your heel.

"How is it possible?" You ask, "Fate is inexorable. How can the Master Key of Fate controvert the Writ of Fate? How can the ruthless calamities that we are destined to meet be averted? How can the ends that are not designed to come our way be achieved?

The explanation is simple enough. Fate which is inevitable in the case of earthly beings fails to operate on the fountain head of Spirit. So if a magnet of the

Benevolent influences of Spiritualism intervenes, even earthly beings acquire the immunity of the Spirit, and absorbing all wholesome influences around in space, turns the most unlucky person into a remarkably lucky one.

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